Culture and Heritage of Kashmir Series II

Lal Ded:

The great Kashmiri Saint-poetess

Editor

Dr. S.S. Toshkhani

KASHMIR EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SCIENCE SOCIETY (REGD.)

NEW DELHI-48

Lal Ded: The great Kashmiri Saint-poetess

Editor
Dr. S.S. Toshkhani



Thanks for the wonderful job done. Dr. Toshkhani

Editor's Copy

M. K. Kaw
President KECSS

Toshkhani
July 2002

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Lal Ded : The Great Kashmiri Saint-Poetess

KASHMIR EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SCIENCE SOCIETY
B-36, Pamposh Enclave, New Delhi - 110 048

Culture and Heritage of Kashmir–
KECSS Research Series II

LAL DED :
THE GREAT KASHMIRI SAINT-POETESS

Edited by
Dr. S.S. Toshkhani

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A guide to transliteration of Kashmiri sounds

Vowels	*As pronounced in*	*Meaning in English*
a	bar	door
ā/aa	bār	weight
à	làr	a house
aà	laàr	cucumber
i	bihun	to sit
ī	sīr	a brick
ĕ	bĕni	sister
ē	hēr	a ladder, steps
u	gur	a horse
ū	gūr	a cowherd
ú	túr	a rag
uú	tuúr	cold
ŏ	dŏr	strong
ō	dōr	race

Consonants

ts	tsūr	a thief
tsh	tshal	a trick
z	zar	deafness
ṭ	ṭul	a lump
ṭh	thūl	an egg
ḍ	dūn	walnut



PREFACE

The Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society (KECSS) in collaboration with N.S. Kashmiri Research Institute held for the first time in the National Capital, New Delhi, a National Seminar on 12 November, 2000 on "Remembering Lal Ded in Modern Times". Lal Ded is considered the greatest spiritual seer and saint-poetess of Kashmir. She lived in Kashmir in the 14th century. Yet, her spiritual eminance is known to every Kashmiri even to this day. She also was a great poetess and thinker and created identity for Kashmiri people as a peace loving, artistic, and cultural people of India who believed in the composite culture of the country. Taking into consideration the recent turmoil in the valley because of militant forces operating from outside Kashmir borders, there is need by scholars to write about the heritage of harmony left behind by Lal Ded and her eminent followers like Nund Rishi and other well-known Rishis. Her *vaakhs* or sayings provide source for peace and harmony. Religious extremism and fundamentalism will gave way to traditional love between communities and, bring enlightenment.

The participants in this seminar on Lal Ded attracted a wide spectrum of eminent scholars, scientists and thinkers. Some participants presented papers, and some spoke in-depth on the occasion. It is hoped that this seminar proceedings will reciprocate ideas from various academic centers of the world, desiring a peaceful world order.

The book should be of wide interest in India and outside India. It should create harmony and creativity for mankind. The KECSS is on the threshold of starting an International Center for Kashmir Studies in order to extensively research on the academic, cultural and social heritage of Kashmir. This seminar provides a very good beginning in this direction.

We thank the distinguished scholars, executive committee members of KECSS, notably Prof. B.B. Dhar, Mr. M.L. Bhatt, Prof. S. Bhatt, Mr. M.L. Kachru, Mr. A.K. Jalla and others who made this historic seminar a success. The Kashmiri community in Pamposh Enclave, New Delhi has always been supporting academic efforts by KECSS. We are grateful to the members of this community for their creative interest.

To Dr. S.S. Toshkhani, an erudite scholar, we are thankful for planning this seminar along with KECSS members, and for editing the seminar proceedings with great insight. Lastly, we are thankful to Mr. S.B. Nangia of A.P.H. Publishing Corporation for publication of this book expeditiously.

Mr. M.K. Kaw
President, KECSS

Prof. B.B. Dhar
Vice President, KECSS

B-36, Pamposh Enclave,
New Delhi-110048

July 1, 2002

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Prof. A.N. Dhar : Prof. Dhar has been the Professor of English and the Head of Department of English, Kashmir University. He is an outstanding scholar who has made important contribution to the academic life of Kashmir and Kashmiri Pandits. He has edited along with Prof. Neerja Mattoo a book on Bhagwan Gopi Nath. Prof. Dhar was awarded a Senior Fellowship Literature by the Department of Culture, Ministry of Human Resources Development and published a book on mysticism, "Mysticism Across Cultures", recently. His address : 504, New Plots, Jammu-180006.

Prof. S. Bhatt : Prof. Bhatt is an Honorary Professor at Hamdard University, New Delhi. He was formerly Professor of Space Law, and, Honorary Professor of International Law, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi. He was also for some years a Consultant and Adviser to the United Nations in many African Countries. He is a Vice-President KECSS and has helped organise several seminars on Kashmiri heritage. He was also Editor in Chief *Koshur Samachar* and has edited a book entitled "Kashmiri Pandits : A Cultural Heritage", circulated in many parts of world. Apart from Kashmir heritage, Prof. Bhatt has written extensively on space law, air law and environments with 16 books to his credit. Many years ago in 1969-70 he conducted research on environmental law as Ful-bright Resident Scholar in SMU, Dallas, Texas, USA. He served in the Govt. of India and retired as Deputy Director General of Civil Aviation. Prof. Bhatt has travelled to many parts of world for academic and official works. Along with Mr. M.K. Kaw and Dr. S.S. Toshkhani, Prof. Bhatt is engaged on an ICSSR project and is the convener for the seminar on Kashmir Environments which will be held in 2003 by KECSS and Kashmir University. His address : S-176, Greater Kailash II, New Delhi-110048.

Dr. S.S. Toshkhani : He is the convenor of this seminar and editor of this important book on "Lal Ded". In academic circles. Dr. Toshkhani, is considered an outstanding authority on Kashmiri literature and history of cultural heritage of Kashmir. He is a thinker, writer, poet, and a genius of all sorts. He is among few scholars from Kashmir who is well-versed in Sharda Script. Dr. Toshkhani comes from an illustrious family of Kashmir. His father late revered Prof. S.K. Toshkhani was a legend of a scholar and researcher of

his time. Dr. Toshkhani is an important consultant to KECSS in academic and research matters and for the institution of the centre for Kashmir Studies. His address : D-8/8050, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070.

Prof. (Mrs.) Neerja Mattoo : Prof. (Mrs.) Mattoo was formerly Professor of English and Head of Department of English, Govt. Women College, Srinagar, Kashmir. She is among few Kashmiri Pandit women scholars who has kept contact with the academic world in Srinagar, Kashmir in recent times. She has translated a collection of Kashmiri short stories under the title "The Stranger Beside Me" which has been published by UBSPD. Along with Prof. A.N. Dhar, she has edited a book on Bhagwan Gopi Nath. She has written on women poets of Kashmir, especially on Rupa Bhawani, and now this time on Lal Ded. Her father late Prof. Sham Lal Dhar was a well-known academician of his time in Srinagar. Her son Prof. Amitabh Mattoo is also a reputed professor of diplomacy and security matters in School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her address : C-8/8559, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070.

Dr. Roop Krishen Bhat : Dr. Bhat is among the younger Kashmiri scholars specializing in Kashmiri language and literature. He is the Principal of Northern Regional Languages Center at Patiala, Punjab. He has convened two important seminars in KECSS on Kashmiri literature and language with recent developments. These two books are in the process of publication. Besides, Dr. Bhat has brought out many research papers on teaching of Kashmiri language from the Centre at Patiala and as part of educational programme of the Ministry of HRD Govt. of India.

Mr. P.N. Kachru : Mr. Kachru is an artist of national repute. He has held many exhibitions of his art and paintings at various places, in the country including the national capital, New Delhi. He has participated and presented papers on Kashmiri art and culture in several national seminars. Currently, he is working as the Treasurer of N.S. Kashmir Research Institute, New Delhi, of which he is a founder member. He is greatly interested in Kashmiri Literature also. His address: C-8/8193, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070.

Mr. S.N. Pandita : Mr. Pandita is the Secretary of N.S. Kashmir Research Institute, New Delhi, an organization devoted to the preservation and protection of Kashmiri cultural heritage. His special field of interest is the interface between Western Indologist and Sanskrit Scholars of Kashmir. Mr. Pandita has participated in several national seminars and presented papers relating to Kashmiri culture and scholarship. Currently, he is working on a book on the history of scholarship in Kashmir. His grand-father, Prof. Nityanand Shastri was one of the best known Sanskrit Scholars of Kashmir. His address: H-128, Saroji Nagar, New Delhi.

Mr. Dwarka Nath Munshi : Mr. Munshi is an outstanding Kashmir Pandit of our generation. He has contributed in many spheres to the Kashmiri society. After a distinguished career in the Govt. of India, Mr. Munshi has dedicated himself to social and academic works of Kashmiri society. He was for many years the President of All India Kashmiri Samaj. He is currently heading the Trust of AIKS. He writes eminently and has contributed many notable articles on Kashmiri social and academic matters in leading journals. His address : B-8, Pamposh Enclave, New Delhi.

Prof. Jayalal Kaul : Prof. Kaul is regarded to be one of the most eminent literary critics and scholars of Kashmir in the 20th century. His book on 'Lal Ded', published by the Sahitya Akademi, is a great work for all time. "Studies in Kashmiri" is another important work of literary criticism by him. But it was his book 'Kashmiri Lyrics' that was the first ever attempt to introduce Kashmiri poetry to English-knowing readers. Prof. Kaul was a Professor of English and Principal of S.P. College in Srinagar. He also worked as Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages for some years, giving it new direction and dynamism. Prof. Kaul is, in fact, one of the leading scholars who created awareness about Kashmiri ethos and Kashmiri literary traditions in and outside Kashmir. It may be recalled that Prof. Jayalal Kaul's father, Pt. Lala Kaul, was himself a great academician who received and accompanied Swami Vivekananda to Kheer Bhawani. Lala Kaul also interacted with the noted Indologist George Bühler. Prof. Kaul's two sons, Mr. Bhuvanesh Kaul and Maj. Gen. A. Kaul have also carried forward the scholarly traditions of this great family. Any reference to Prof. Jayalal Kaul may be had from his elder son, Mr. Bhuvanesh Kaul, 2219-D/II Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070.

Prof. C.L. Sapru : Prof. Sapru is the popular editor of *Koshur Samachar* (Kashmiri Section). He is an erudite scholar and has vast knowledge about Kashmiri history, culture and literature.

INTRODUCTION

This book is a compilation of the presentations made at a National Seminar on Lal Ded organized jointly by the Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society and N. S. Kashmir Research Institute in New Delhi on November 12, 2000. Participating in the one-day Seminar, which was titled "Remembering Lal Ded in Modern Times", scholars presented the celebrated saint-poetess as one of the greatest symbols of Kashmir's spiritual culture. Focussing on her greatness both as a saint and a maker of Kashmiri language and literature, they explored various aspects of Lal Ded's poetry and personality. Lal Ded, they pointed out in their papers, is quintessentially Kashmiri, her verses reflecting a sense of values and ideals that form the bedrock of the civilizational ethos of Kashmir; yet, they said, her appeal is universal as she talks of the oneness of all existence and shows an extraordinary awareness of the human condition in all its complexity, her Shaivite world-view providing answers to so many of the fundamental existential questions that disturb the human mind. Lal Ded's vision of reality as the manifestation of one indivisible consciousness pervading everything, her insistence on the inwardness of the spiritual experience and rejection of all kinds of sham and pretence, her revolt against dogma and external ceremony, her broad humanistic concerns and the strong egalitarian tone of her verses–all these can be considered as factors that explain her pervasive hold on the Kashmiri psyche and also her relevance in the present-day world.

Lal Ded is also remembered today for her unique poetic idiom which derives its power and charm from the images of everyday life. Lal Ded moved among the ordinary men and women of her times with whom she shared her deep spiritual insights and to whom she made accessible some of the most profound truths of the Trika philosophy. She preferred to talk to them in their own colloquial speech instead of the elitist Sanskrit - although her compositions are predominantly Sanskritic in its diction - reflecting the actual linguistic situation of the times. It is this choice of the medium of expression, together with her liberal humanistic approach to the questions confronting her age, that accounts for her phenomenal popularity as a spiritual leader who guided her people through a period of tremendous civilizational crisis that threatened to tear apart the entire social fabric of the 14th century Kashmir in which she happened to live. The importance of Lal Ded's role at that point of time in Kashmir's history lies in her success in ensuring continuity and simultaneously ushering in change. As a poet, she attained heights which no other Kashmiri poet has been able to scale so far. Her verses, called *vaakhs*, along with the *shruks* of Nunda Rishi, formed the basis for a new indigenous identity of Kashmir to evolve. No wonder, therefore, that her name evokes such deep resonances in the minds of ordinary Kashmiris more than six hundred years after she left her mortal coils, her poetry giving them both spiritual solace and moral strength to face the challenges of life.

Yet another important point that should engaged scholars' attention is the need for preparing an authentic text of *Lallavaakhs*. This, has acquired a great urgency in view of the massive interpolations that have been introduced in the intervening centuries, both inadvertently and deliberately, confusing the ordinary reader's mind and confounding the serious scholar in his attempt to interpret their real meaning.

The way spurious verses are made to pass as genuine utterances of Lal Ded has led to numerous distortions of the facts of life and misinterpretations of her thoughts and beliefs. That there is a definite design behind such exercises, is shown by the persistent attempts being made to appropriate Lal Ded to belief-systems totally alien to her. This view, expressed by several scholars, underlines the great importance of sifting the spurious *vaakhs* attributed to the saint-poetess from the genuine ones that could be considered to have actually fallen from her lips. The best way to arrive at an authentic Lal Ded, they suggest, is to compare the linguistic features of her *vaakhs* with the language of extant Kashmiri works belonging to the period immediately preceding or following her.

With these themes dominating the course of discussions at the Seminar, Lal Ded emerged as a symbol that marked the connectivity of all Kashmiris with their tradition—a symbol that has become all the more significant in the context of the present troubled situation in Kashmir. Her unique vision of spirituality, it was realized, was essentially poetic and her vision of poetry essentially spiritual. The various views put forward by the scholars participating in the Seminar comprise the first section of this book, which has been divided into three sections for the convenience of the readers. It is the universality of Lal Ded's spiritual vision that **Mr. M.K. Kaw**, Secretary Education, Government of India and President KCESS focussed on in the keynote address he delivered at the Seminar under the title, "The Guru and the Pandit". "Lal Ded", Mr. Kaw says, "believed that the entire facade of outer ceremony that all religions create has nothing to do with spirituality". The distinction that she sought to draw between the Guru and the Pandit is, according to Mr. Kaw, "of essence in our under-standing her true message for it removes the cobwebs of our thinking so far as religion is

concerned." Describing as "outdated" the "copyright that traditional religions claim on the original science of spirituality", Mr. Kaw says that "Lal Ded's philosophy was an attempt to break these monopolies and create a universal science of spirituality."

After Mr. Kaw's brief but brilliant presentation on "the essence of Lal Ded's teachings" we have scholar, writer and a former Head of English Department, Kashmir University, **Prof. A.N. Dhar** giving his rationale for "A Reappraisal of Lal Ded" as "the need of the hour". Prof. Dhar considers it necessary to sift the genuine outpourings or *vaakhs* of the great saint "from the spurious ones before attempting to reinterpret them with a view to removing "numerous misconceptions and erroneous notions" about Lal Ded, some of which, he believes, are "based on deliberate distortions and even lies spread to serve a vested interest". Prof. Dhar strongly rebuts the claim that Lal Ded at a later stage of her life came under the decisive influence of Islam followed by her so-called conversion to Islam, citing Prof. Jayalal Kaul to support his views. The celebrated Kashmiri mystic poets Sheikh Nur-ud-Din and Shams Faqir, he points out, have both used conspicuous Sanskrit words in their poetic tributes to Lalleshwari so as to "categorically recognize her religious background and faith".

Reviewing various works of Lal Ded scholarship published so far, Prof, Dhar rightly describes Prof. Jayalal Kaul's book "Lal Ded" as "a monumental little volume that can serve as a guide book to the respective researchers". While agreeing with Prof. Kaul that Lal Ded was a Shaiva *yogini*, he nevertheless states that he does not find Vedanta altogether different from the Trika philosophy she was steeped in. He urges Lal Ded scholars not to "overstress Lalla's being a Shaivite poet", as that may make us "overlook her catholicity". "Lal Ded", he concludes, "is a great poet precisely because

she is intensely spiritual, and conversely she is highly spiritual because she is gifted with extraordinary poetic sensibility".

In his paper 'Lal Ded : Her Spiritualism and Present Scientific World Order', **Prof. S. Bhatt**, well-known environment scientist, author, former Professor of International Law, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and Vice-President, KECSS, explains Lal Ded's poetry and spiritual philosophy in terms of the principles "which could reconcile the new philosophy of science and modern man's concern for mysticism and spiritual development". Quoting the views of Einstein and post-Einstein scientists like Prigogine, Prof. Bhatt feels that with profound change in the scientific concept of nature, the world today is "strongly shifting towards a revival of mysticism". "The world", he says, "is witnessing a new dialogue between mysticism practiced by seers like Lal Ded that produces pure consciousness in human beings and the new philosophy of science". Prof. Bhatt wants it to be conveyed to the world community that Lal Ded's spiritual philosophy is bound to create a new cosmic vision of mankind, "which will greatly benefit the present world order". Her *vaakhs* "have a freshness that is perennial", Prof. Bhatt observes, "Their truth is eternal and appropriate for the modern mind"

In his paper 'Reconstructing and Reinterpreting Lal Ded', **Dr. S. S. Toshkhani**, Convener of the Seminar and Chairman, NSKRI, contends that most of the image constructs built around Lal Ded are not representative of the personality that is reflected in her verses, nor do they agree with the basic framework of her thought and expression. These constructs are "confusing and even mutually contradicting" as they are "linked inextricably with the motives, predilections and perceptions" of their creators, Dr. Toshkhani observes, emphasizing the need to reconstruct Lal Ded's image "in light of facts authenticated by the evidence of her verses".

Referring to the mystic strain in Lal Ded's poetry, Dr. Toshkhani says that it does not have a Sufist origin; its roots lie deep in devotional Shaivism of which Bhatta Narayana and Utpaldeva were the earlier exponents. Lacing his observation with examples from the works of all the three poets, he points out that their images and metaphors are "strikingly similar". However, there is no tendency in Lal Ded to separate mystic experience from everyday experience. Ridiculing the tendency to reduce Lal Ded to what he calls "a one verse poet", and to project her as spokesperson of the "present day secular discourse". Dr. Toshkhani thinks that the greatest need for Lal Ded scholars today is to reclaim authentic Lal Ded by arriving at a critical text of her *vaakhs.* The best way to do so, he suggests, would be to study the linguistic features of early Kashmiri poetry as reflected in extant works like "Chhumma Sampradaya" and "Mahanaya Prakasha", written before Lal Ded's time and "Banasura Katha" and "Sukha Dukha Charit" composed in the years succeeding her.

Dr. Toshkhani's paper presents Lal Ded as a poet who is "more modern than contemporary Kashmiri poets", and points to her poetic sensibility, her self-awareness, her existential anguish, her grasp of the complexity of the human situation, her catholic outlook, her sense of universal harmony and her astonishing choice of metaphor and image.

Writer, scholar, translator **Prof. (Mrs.) Neerja Mattoo's** paper looks at Lal Ded as "the poet who gave voice to women", an aspect which has received very little attention so far. Describing the celebrated saint - poetess as "a path-breaking woman who through her mystic poetry set in motion a cultural, linguistic and religious revolution", Prof. Mattoo says that her work "like Shakespeare's, has a timeless meaning accessible to people of different intellectual levels".

Prof. Mattoo's paper approaches Lal Ded's work from what can be termed a feminist's point of view, stating that "Lal Ded's is an individual voice unfettered by norms, ritual obeisance or conventions, a powerful voice giving expression to the wishes of all those men and women who wish to find a way out of the labyrinth of the human situation". And in this respect, says Prof. Mattoo in her brilliantly written paper, Lal Ded is a precursor to Mirabai. "It is also a pointer to the fact that Lal Ded had effortlessly transcended gender and struck a blow at the prevalent patriarchy even as early as the fourteenth century. The so called liberated woman of the twentieth century appears much smaller in comparison"

Referring to the images and metaphors used by Lal Ded in her *vaakhs*, Prof. Mattoo says that these come from ordinary life. "The porter, wearer, carpenter, blacksmith and other unprivileged classes, who from the backbone of village and town economies, find their work and trade celebrated in her *Vaakhs* even while they tackle abstruse Shaivite practices", she observes, giving a subaltern context to Lal Ded's poetry. Prof. Mattoo's paper also takes a "close look" at the "mechanics" of *vaakh*, the verse form used by Lal Ded, analyzing its acoustic and semantic elements in a refreshingly original manner.

Dr. Roop Krishen Bhat's academic paper, 'The Language of Lal Ded's Vaakhs', analyses the linguistic aspects of Lal Ded's poetry. Dr. Bhat is of the view that the *vaakhs* present an "authentic proof" that their language was a form of proto-Kashmiri". "It was the common man's colloquial language and not the kind of classical language used by scholars", he observes while examining and analyzing its phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic features. A well- known linguist, Dr. Roop Krishen Bhat is the Principal of Northern Regional Language Centre, Patiala.

In his paper titled 'Lal Ded and Kashmir Chroniclers', **Mr. P.N. Kachru,** well-known artist and NSKRI Treasurer, flays Kashmiri chroniclers for their total silence on Lal Ded, lambasting them for what he calls their "fictitiousness" and "crafty penmanship". They have ignored the history of intellectual and cultural thought in Kashmir, Mr. Kachru feels. His paper refers to the story given by the Sanskrit chronicler "Jonaraja of a Jogini" who is said to have offered Prince Shihab-ud-Din a cup of wine. In the later Persian chronicles the contents of the cup have been changed from wine to juice or milk so that Islamic sentiments are not offended, the paper says. Another example of the falsification and distortion of facts by Kashmiri chroniclers that Mr. Kachru gives is about Lal Ded's supposed meeting with the Islamic missionary, Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani. He describes the accounts of the chroniclers in this respect as "untenable and unreliable".

Mr. S.N. Pandita's paper 'Lal Vaakhs—Their Journey from Memory to Manuscript', throws light on how Lal Ded's verses were transcribed from memory to manuscript so as to be brought out in an authentic version. Mr. Pandita, who is Secretary, NSKRI, contends in this paper that it would not have been possible for Western scholars like Grierson to write and collect works on Lal Ded without the help of Kashmiri scholars. He makes special reference to the contribution of Pandit Madhusan Kaul Shastri, Pandit Laxman Kaul, Pandit Prakash Kokilu and Prof. Nityanand Shastri in the compilation and collation of various versions of *Lallavaakhs.*

We have included the transcription of an extempore speech made at the Seminar by **Mr. D.N. Munshi,** Chairman, All India Kashmiri Samaj Trust, in this book. Describing Lalleshwari as a rebel, Mr. Munshi contends that a "whatever she said or did had some mission behind it to

correct the prevailing wrong practices and show the path to piety". In Mr. Munshi's opinion, works of a poet-philosopher of Lal Ded's eminence have remained confined to the Valley, making her "only a name in the exclusive academic circles of the country as a whole", because her verses have not been "appropriately and intensely translated into other languages".

Not all the speeches delivered in the Seminar, however, could be included in this book either because they were too brief or because their transcripts were not readily available. Notable among these were the views expressed by **Ms. Chandrakanta**, well-known Hindi short - story writer and novelist, and **Prof. Ashok Kaul**, Associate Professor of Sociology at the Benares Hindu University. Ms. Chandrakanta said that Lal Ded had become an integral part of the life and lore of every Kashmiri. We should be proud, she said, of the rich legacy of poetry and thought which Lal Ded has bequeathed to us. Prof. Ashok Kaul said that today when societies were fragmented and people reduced to "screen miners and cyber community", ideology is dead and geography transcended, it was tradition that could give one a sense of belonging and purpose. "And so, I belong to the Lal Ded tradition–that's my connectivity", he asserted.

Writer and social and cultural activist, **Prof. Chaman Lal Sapru's** paper 'Lalleshwari aur Kabir', originally in Hindi, has been translated into English for the benefit of readers. Prof. Sapru is the editor of the Kashmiri section of Koshur Samachar. Pointing to the many similarities between the two great Bhakti poets, he says that both of them were poets of protest–fierce critics of religious dogma, external ceremony and ritualistic forms of worship who fought orthodoxy and assailed religious hypocrisy. Both of them spoke to the common masses in their own language impacting with their powerful poetic idiom and rebellious stance while emphasizing that God could be found only within one's own

self. Both believed in the fellowship of human beings and the oneness of all existence, with the fact remaining that in all this Lalleshwari preceded Kabir.

This book has been divided into three sections for the convenience of the readers.

The first section of this volume concludes with the "Concluding Remarks" made by Mr. M.K. Kaw at the end of the Seminar on Lal Ded. In the second section we have excerpts from **Prof. Jayalal Kaul's** monumental book on Lal Ded condensed ably by his worthy sons, **Major General (Retd.) A. Kaul** and **Mr. Bhuvnesh Kaul** for ready reference and for the benefit of those readers who may not have gone through it. At the end, and as the third section of this book, we have given twenty-three *vaakhs* of Lal Ded with their English translation. Both the selection and translation of the *vaakhs* has been done, quite brilliantly, by Prof. Neerja Mattoo, who has very kindly permitted us to publish them. Expressing our gratitude to Prof. Mattoo, we hope the readers will find the translations greatly interesting and refreshingly different.

But, despite her towering stature as a poet-philosopher, and despite all her attainments as a spiritual genius, the bibliography on Lal Ded is woefully scant and wanting in many respects–hardly half-a-dozen critical works which really provide an insight into her poetry and personality. Whether or not this small volume can be considered as a worthy addition to this list is for the readers to decide. We hope it will revive exitensive interest on Lal Ded and her *vaakhs* all over India, and in many parts of world, especially among the non-resident Kashmiris and others.

Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani

Section 1

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE SEMINAR

CHAPTER 1

THE GURU AND THE PANDIT*

M.K. KAW

Friends, I welcome you to this Seminar jointly organized by the Kashmiri Education, Culture and Science Society and the N.S. Kashmir Research Institute. The theme of the Seminar is quite appropriate and will enable us not only to remember Lal Ded, but also examine her thoughts and teachings to cull out those nuggets of wisdom which are relevant in the modern context.

As there are many learned scholars here, I will desist from either giving direct quotations from the *Lallavaakhs* or from explaining in great detail as to what Lal Ded actually said. I would like to concentrate on the essence of her teaching in order to delineate what I think her message is for Kashmiri Pandits living at this stage of human history and indeed for the whole of humanity.

Let me begin by taking up her constant refrain that spirituality is not something which is significant because it is useful to us after we die. Although in common with all

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* Keynote address delivered at the National Seminar on 'Remembering Lal Ded in Modern Times' held on 12th November, 2000 in Delhi.

Hindus she believed in the theory of re-birth and *karma*, and considered *moksha* to be the desideratum of life, the release was best obtained while one was living, that was to be achieved as a *jivanmukta*. This is a teaching which should be an eye-opener for those who consider spirituality to be an enterprise fit only for old age, when one is thinking of what will happen after death. The obvious implication is that spirituality is an activity on which one should embark while still in one's youth, so that one attains the fruit thereof in this life itself.

In fact, Lal Ded also took the revolutionary intellectual leap of going beyond the theory of *moksha*, when she saw the eternal nature of Shiva and the fact that there is an never-ending play going on here. It is we who have been here in the past and it is we who have to be here in the future. It is only we who have been here since the beginning of time. Shiva will never cease to rise and set. It is an obvious hint that the play of the Lord is eternal and unceasing. What we, in fact, refer to as *moksha* may only turn out to be a release from various kinds of bondages. It may be *moha-kshaya*, that is, the end of delusion. It may be that we are rid of the *vaasanaas* and negative mental attributes. It may be that we need not assume the physical body in a regimented way but attain the power to assume the kind of body we wish in order to achieve whatever divine purpose is assigned to us or we assign to ourselves. It may be that we are released from a lower region of bound souls to rise to a higher region of partially released souls. There are many possibilities but the implication is that Paramashiva being the only reality, the universe is only His play and we are the instruments of His play. The play has ever been and will ever be. In that sense, *moksha* is itself not the end but the beginning of an eternal adventure where the individual soul awakens into greater and greater wakefulness, awareness and bliss. The possibilities are endless.

Having made these two contributions that spirituality is a prime objective of this very life and that spirituality is a never-ending adventure, Lal Ded then moves into the realm of modalities, is it that any particular religion has the monopoly of truth ? Far from her claiming that Hinduism or Kashmir Shaivism represents the only truth, she lashes out at all organized religions. Spirituality is not something that can be achieved by outer activities. All religion is mainly composed of outer actions. She cannot see the logic in worshipping a stone, which is indistinguishable from the temple. Rituals are meaningless, pilgrimages to holy places useless, fasting serves no purpose, beads and rosaries are mere plaything. Obviously, the entire facade of outer ceremony that all organized religions create is a mere commercial enterprise which helps to fatten the merchants of religion. It has nothing to do with true spirituality, which is a purely internal enterprise.

Here I would like to refer to Lal Ded's constant refrain that she is grateful to her guru and that the pandit has to be shunned. She has drawn an intriguing distinction between the guru and the pandit to which we must pay more attention. Indeed, I feel that if the difference between the two becomes clear to us, it will remove all the cobwebs of our thinking as far as religion is concerned.

As far as I have understood, spirituality is not different from other knowledge-related activities. What is involved here is a science of spirituality, a technology of spirituality and a commercial exploitation of the science and the technology. If we analyze the way in which any of our organized religions has evolved, we find that there is an original person—whether we call him incarnation of God, or a prophet, or a messenger or a Buddha or the Son of God or whatever. He enunciates some eternal truths, which constitute the science of spirituality.

Then, there is an attempt to work out the practical implications of the theoretical concepts and these become the outer manifestation of spirituality in terms of meditation techniques, breath control devices, physical postures, rosaries and fasts, vigils and pilgrimages, worship and prayer, songs and psalms, *aasanas* and dances. These could be called collectively as the technology of spirituality. The last stage is when the intellectual property is commercially exploited by the merchants of religion by prescribing ceremonies and rituals, feasts and festivals, confessions and repentances, sacrifices and *havans*, all of which involve a transfer of financial benefits from the laity to the clergy.

The avatara is the person who enunciates the science, the guru is the one who devises the technology and the pandit is a merchant who sells the science and the technology for personal profit. We should be beholden to Lal Ded for having pointed out the sharp distinction between the guru and the pandit.

What we have to learn from her in the modern context is that this whole primitive idea of individual traditional religions taking out a copyright law, the proponent can claim a monopoly for a limited period of time, not exceeding 50-60 years. Traditional religions hold their monopoly for centuries and their copyright never ceases. The unfortunate fall-out of this phenomenon is that the intellectual property never becomes part of the public domain, with the result that we have fragments of truths strewn here and there, but no facility of picking up the universal truths of each religion in order to build a common science of spirituality for the whole of mankind.

Lal Ded's philosophy was an attempt to break these monopolies and create a universal science of spirituality. In her we find an eclectic spirit so broad and expansive as to

cover Shaivism and Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Sufism, Christianity and Islam. She zeroed in on the rajayogic technology of arousing the *kundalini* through breath control, management of the pranic energy, meditational techniques and a simplified model of living.

Friends, today if we need anything more than everything else it is the transcendence of traditional religions so that we all believe in a universal science of spirituality. It is only when we do this that we can be brothers and sisters in the true sense of the word, breathing the same air, drinking the same water, basking in the same light, sharing all the strengths and weaknesses of our bodies, minds, intellects and souls. Only then can we be tolerant towards one another. Only then shall we cease to propagate our own brands and start collecting all the known spiritual truths into a single theoretical framework. Only then shall we stop killing one another. Only then shall we stop consuming the earth's resources in an euphoria of greed and consumerism. Only then shall we stop spreading chemical poisons into our food, air and water, and stop committing collective suicide. Only then shall we discontinue the maniac attempt to convert all others to our particular brand-name so as to give ourselves a disproportionately large share of the national economic cake.

Let us resolve today as we proceed to analyse Lal Ded vaakh by vaakh that we shall propagate her approach to spirituality, that we shall contribute our bit to the building up of a universal science of spirituality which will be acceptable to all, that we shall be able to accommodate the disparate spiritual technologies as being different paths to the common divine, and that we shall be able to keep at a reasonable distance both the commercial as well as the political exploiters of religious sentiments.

May Mother Lalleshwari smoothen our path and lead us to understanding wisdom and bliss !

Chapter 2

A RE-APPRAISAL OF LAL DED

Prof. A.N. Dhar

Reappraising Lal Ded as a saint-poet and mystic is the need of the hour, and the present Seminar offers an excellent opportunity to the participants to engage themselves in serious deliberations on the issue. Perhaps this task has to focus first on exploring what the genuine poetic outpourings or vaakhs of the great saint are (to be sifted from the spurious ones). Then a reinterpretation of the genuine utterances is to be attempted with a view to removing a number of misconceptions and erroneous notions about Lal Ded, some of them obviously based on deliberate distortions and even lies spread to serve a vested interest. All this will call for rigorous research—that is a challenging task in view of our present inaccessibility to the relevant and some indispensable materials lying unused in the State Research Library, that was years back shifted to the Kashmir University campus at Hazratbal, Srinagar.

In spite of the severe handicaps of Lal Ded scholarship, fresh research studies on the saint-poet can take off from the pioneering work in the background accomplished by such scholars as Bhaskar Razdan, Grierson and Barnett, Sir Richard Temple and Pt. Anand Kaul. To my mind, Prof. Jayalal Kaul's "Lal Ded", a subsequent publication, is a monumental

little volume that can serve as a guide-book to the prospective researchers. Compact and packed as it is with documentary details, it has to be tapped with care as a rich resource, being highly useful as a secondary source material. Professor Kaul has also done a pioneering job in raising sensible and legitimate questions about the authenticity of Lalla Vaakh—how best to establish it through a stylistic study of the utterances as they have come down to us by word of mouth. His intelligent grasp of what linguistic change, over a period of time, in its bearing on the vaakhs, involves in a cross-cultural context is praiseworthy. Some of the racial observations he has made further on the so-called evidence of various influences on Lal Ded are valuable too. And his forceful rebuttal of the claims some scholars have made about the fusion of various schools and creeds in her vaakh, as if consciously attempted by her, deserves to be specially complemented. His total rejection of the evidence put forward by a couple of scholars that Lal Ded at a later stage of her life came under the decisive influence of Islam, followed by her conversion to the new faith, is based on sound and convincing arguments.

Prof. Jayatal Kaul's outstanding contribution to Lal Ded scholarship in the book titled "Lal Ded" has been followed by another accomplished work on the saint-poet authored by Prof. B. N. Parimoo, which too is a significant contribution in terms of his detailed literary translation and interpretation of the vaakhs. Its chief merit lies in the chapter-wise sequencing of the verse-sayings aimed at demonstrating Lalla's spiritual ascent to the plane of supreme consciousness and her union with Parma Shiva as a yogini. Both Prof. Parimoo and his predecessor, Prof. Jayalal Kaul, have maintained that Lalla followed the Shaivite technique of meditation based on kundalini yoga.

Subsequent works on Lal Ded brought out in the past three decades or so include Nilakanth Kotru's "Lal Ded : Her

Life and Sayings" published in 1989, a special 'Lal Ded' number of the Koshur Samachar brought out in the year 1971 and Prof. R.N. Kaul's "Kashmir's Mystic : Poetess Lal Ded alias Lalla Arifa" published in 1999. Nilakanth Kotru too has attempted his own English translations of the vaakhs, falling in line with the vaakh-sequence adopted by Jayalal Kaul before him. His meanings and explanations are plain and simple, reflecting, at the same time, a good grasp of the doctrines of Kashmir Shaivism. As regards Prof. R.N. Kaul's recent book on Lal Ded, it has some novel features that cannot escape the attention of the thoughtful reader. It is readable and enjoyable in view of its literary charm and lucidity of expression. The interpretation of the vaakhs points very much to a perceptive and assimilative mind behind the book–inasmuch as the content of the vaakhs is made intelligible to the average reader, appealing, at the same time, to the scholar through the author's beauty of expression. The book would have gained further in value if the author had provided adequate details about the essentials of Trika or Kashmir Shaivism and mysticism in general in his account of Lalla as Kashmir's Mystic (which is the main title of the book).

The special number of the Koshur Samachar mentioned earlier is a very useful source-material for the Lal Ded scholar who cannot, in the prevailing circumstances, have an easy access to the materials available in the State Research Library. Besides providing English translations of Lalla's verse-sayings in a separate section, the journal contains useful and learned articles in English and Hindi contributed by many competent writers from our community and also by some well-known writers like Abdul Ahad Azad, Amin Kamil and Prof. Rehman Rahi. It also contains two short write-ups in English contributed by Swami Lakshman Joo and J. Rudrappa.

I should like to mention two more materials on Lal Ded before I switch on to the other related aspects of the topic of this paper. I was able to lay my hands on the small volume titled "Lalleshwari Remembered" by Swami Muktananda published in 1981. The Preface by Swami Prajnananda and the Introduction by Joseph Chilton Pearce, both thoughtfully written, are valuable as informative pieces on Lal Ded and her sayings. Then follow English renderings of the sayings in the form of poems attempted in the free-verse pattern. These poems capture the essence of the vaakhs without observing accuracy in keeping close to the form and content of the original text. They could be described as transcreations rather than translations. Joseph Chilton Pearce justifies this feature by observing that "a true translation is always a re-creation".

The other book I acquired very recently was published in early 1999. It bears the title "Voice of Experience : Lall Vaakh of Lall Ded / Lali Shori of Kashmir" and contains English translations of 154 vaakhs attempted by the author, B.N. Sopori. The vaakhs are grouped under five headings chosen as the titles of individual chapters - 'Sadhana', 'Adventure in Space', 'Fortitude', 'Precepts' and 'Discourses with Guru (Master)'. In the Foreword, the author himself, as translator and commentator, describes his particular approach to the study of the vaakhs–involving scientific terms and concepts such as 'vibration', 'frequency', 'wavelength' etc. which, interestingly it seems to me, are drawn from his professional vocabulary as a former employee of the Department of Telecommunication. Since he is not a man of any special literary expertise, he has not been able to develop his ideas into a coherent and systematic theory sustainable throughout the study. He manages somehow to communicate intelligibly in English though his command of the language is faulty at places. All the same, he seems

knowledgeable about the import of the vaakhs in terms of actual yogic practice. As he informed me himself, he plans to bring out a second volume as a sequel to the present one, which will contain another 150 vaakhs or so. I wonder if all the vaakhs the author has collected are authentic as Lal vaakh. The present volume has sold well despite what I see as its shortcomings. The author's attempt is a laudable one.

That Lalla was a rare genius–both as a saint and as a poet–is disputed by none, and is acknowledged by all Kashmiris, Hindus and Muslims alike. It is essentially through the vaakhs, which she uttered as direct outpourings from her heart rather than as consciously wrought poetic compositions, that Lalla became very popular as a saint-poet in Kashmir. As Professor Jayalal Kaul very aptly observes, there was no polarization between Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims in her time; the vaakhs made a tremendous impact on the collective psyche of the two communities. Perhaps most Muslims being only fresh converts to their new faith were as receptive to the wise sayings of the saint-poet as the Hindus who then must have still been in the majority as the natives of the Valley. Even after the latter got reduced to a minority in consequence of conversions, Lalla continued to be held in reverence as 'Lal Ded' by both the communities. She was also called 'Lalleshwari' by one community and 'Lalla Arifa' by the other, showing that both thought very highly of her spiritual attainment in accordance with their religious perceptions. If a Muslim hailed her as an 'Arifa', he did not mean to convey that she had been influenced by Islam in any remarkable way or had accepted a new faith. Later, some Muslim scholar made deliberate distortion of facts in asserting that Lalla had experienced inward "illumination" only after coming into contact with Sayyid Hussain Samnani and had then got converted to Islam. This wishful myth can't stand the test of reason and must be exploded. It has, however, done the

mischief: I recall having read in a secondary source-material on Lal Ded that the saint-poet has been mentioned as a convert to Islam in some encyclopedia. If Muslim scholars draw a parallel between Rabia and Lalla as love-mystics, this seems a befitting comparison and should be acceptable to us. But to distort history and try to perpetuate a lie about Lalla's faith should be rebutted with convincing arguments as Prof. Jayalal Kaul has already done on the basis of his sound Lal Ded scholarship.

Significantly, it is Lalla's younger contemporary, Nunda Rishi or Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali, acknowledged by the Kashmiri Muslims as well to have been blessed by her at his birth, who has paid her this befitting and glowing tribute :

तस पद्मानपोरिचि लले,
तमि गले अमृत पीवा।
स्व साऽन्य अवतार ल्वले,
त्युथुय मे वर दितो दीवा।

That Lalla of Padmanpora (Pampore)–she drank
Her fill of divine nectar;
She was indeed an avtaar of ours (dearly loved)
O God, grant me the same boon !

There are three crucial sacred terms used in the Kashmiri text of the tribute that are obviously derived from our *shastras: deeva* (god), *avtaar* (incarnation) and *var* (boon). The words confirm that Nunda Rishi held Lalla in great esteem and looked upon her as a saint of remarkable achievement, having all the qualities of a divine incarnation.

Evidently, he aspires to emulate her, craving to have "his fill of nectar" too as a boon from God. Keeping in view the content of the verse quoted, the responsive reader when informed of the following remark about Lalla made by Sir

Richard Temple in his book titled "The Word of Lalla" (C.U.P., 1924) will hardly give any credence to it (the remark) but reject it as a piece of misinformation:

Lalla is said to have been influenced by the great national patron saint of the Kashmiris named Noor-ud-Din Wali of Tsrar-i-Sharif (see p. 3. of Richard Temple's book).

Prof. Jayalal Kaul, quoting the remark in his book titled "Lal Ded", makes his observation on it in these words :

As every Kashmiri, Hindu or Muslim, sees it, the truth is the other way round. Besides, Lal Ded should have been sixty, if not more, when Nunda Rishi was born. (Quoted from p. 72 of Jayalal Kaul's Lal Ded)

Yes, the real truth is that as a saint, Nunda Rishi was greatly influenced by Lal Ded. It was his unqualified veneration for the saint-poetess that had a great impact on the devout Muslims, his followers. That explains why for several centuries Kashmiri Muslims have continued to own her, delighting in memorizing and quoting her sayings as Kashmiri Hindus do, singing the vaakhs on appropriate occasions–festive events such as marriage ceremonies and at cultural functions. Another important tribute to the spiritual genius of Lal Ded has been paid by Shams Faqir in his poem 'ज़ान मिलॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य' :

ज़ानुवुॅनि ज़ान कर प्राणस ज्ञानस,
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
पूज़ायि करॅनि गऽयि मंज़ करमुॅवानस,
धर्मुॅ शास्तुॅरनिस बुतख़ानस।
को'र ललि यिकुवट आकाश प्राणस
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
सो'दु बाऽय वदुना को'र पाऽन्य पानस,

दिवुर मंगि क्याह दिवुर वटस।
ललि त्रोव ज़ल नो'ट मंज़ पो'तुॅल्य ख़ानस,
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
छ़लुॅ गऽयि ललुॅमऽच़ शुराहयार श्रानस,
पिलुॅ तमि को'र ज़गि तार तरनस।
कलुॅ तमि चो़'टनय नफ़सि शेतानस,
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
सबक़ तति रूदुय तस अबख छानस,
राज़दाऽन्य तऽम्य लऽज़ वाऽरानस
ललि ओस नीलुॅवठ ललुॅवुन पानस,
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
व्यपदीश करनि गऽयि नुन्दुॅरेशानस,
ज़ानस मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
छे़'पि छे़'पिरस गिदुंन शाह हमदानस
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।
शम्स फ़कीर नाऽमी पर कांटस,
छ़ाय वुछतुॅ मा छय रौ सिरियस।
छ़ाय ओ'बुर लाऽगिथ खऽच़ आस्मानस,
ज़ान मिलुॅनाव भगवानस सूॅत्य।

O you enlightened one,
Recognize the vital air and attain gnosis
To realize God:
Real worship is performed
In life's workshop itself:
What the holy scriptures truly mean
By 'the house of idols';
Lalla achieved the fusion
Of her vital air and ether,
And thus realized God;
Sodabhai (on the other hand) got lachrymose,

What would he ask of the stone image?
Lalla dropped the pitcher of water
Inside the house of idols
And attained god-realization;
Intoxicated (as a mystic) she contrived
To bathe at the confluence of 'sixteen rivers',
And she built a 'bridge'
Across the ocean of temporal existence;
She knocked off the Devil's head
And gained self-recognition;
The 'unskilled carpenter',
Having built the palace in wilderness,
Learnt a lesson from Lalla!
She had to bear with the stone
Her mother-in-law kept concealed
In the plate of rice served to her
(She stood to gain from this austerity);
Lalla went to Nunda Rishi's to teach him her doctrine -
What the rinda mystics call gnosis (irfaan);
She played 'hide and seek' with Shah Hamdan
And had a direct 'encounter' with God;
O, you learned Shams,
The sun does not have a shadow;
Lalla ascended to heaven like a cloud,
Realize God (as she did).

(Translation by the author)

The poem is, in fact, Shams Faqir's extended tribute to the spiritual qualities and attainments of the celebrated poet-mystic Lal Ded. Aware of her religious background and her upbringing in a Shaivite Kashmiri Pandit family, Shams Faqir uses conspicuous Kashmiri words of Sanskrit origin, derived from the Hindu scriptures, while paying his poetic homage to the noted 14th century saint-poet. The words include terms

such as praan (vital air), jnaan (knowledge), aakaash (ether), karmavaan (meaning life's workshop' in the poem); it generally means 'a performer of good actions' or 'a fortunate person having performed good actions in his or her past life'. Shams Faqir is categorical in duly recognizing Lalla's religious background and faith; he acknowledges her individual genius as a spiritual Master and her 'ascent' to the Highest Abode.

On the basis of the internal evidence from the vaakhs, the thoughtful reader is left in no doubt about Lalla's spiritual moorings as a yogini : her Shaivite upbringing in a Kashmiri Brahman family. We have unmistakable clues in some of Lalla's vaakhs about her initiation into yoga at the hands of her Guru, Sedamol, who was an accomplished siddha as a follower of the Shaivite path. The very first vaakh (from among many vaakhs) in which Lalla talks of her initiation into spirituality and of the remarkable effect of the guru mantra on her, convinces us that she immediately experienced "illumination of the Self". She had no reason to roam any more in search of a spiritual guide:

ग्वरन वो'नॅुनम कुनुय वच़ुन,
न्यबरॅु दो'पनम अंदर अच़ुन।
सुय गव ललि म्ये वाख तॅु वच़ुन
तवय ह्यो'तमय नंगय नच़ुन।।

The Guru gave me but one precept,
"From without turn inward",
It came to me "Lalla" as God's word;
I started roaming nude.

The vaakh explicitly conveys that Lalla experienced instant spiritual transformation and was thrown into a state of ecstasy on receiving the guru's word. Elsewhere she says वुछुम पंडिडत पनॅुनि गरे (I found the all-knowing Self within

—in the sanctuary of my own heart), वुछिम शिव तुॅ शक्त मीलिथ।" I saw Shiva and Shakti conjoined in eternal embrace" and तवय वाऽचुस प्रकाशस्थान (that's how I attained the Abode of Light). A tone of confidence and self-assurance, based on a sense of spiritual fulfillment and an awareness of the ultimate truth, is clearly reflected in these utterances of Lal Ded. We are convinced that she has got to the root of the matter and attained self-realization. Her affirmative statements, such as those quoted, confirm her Hindu faith throughout (call it Shaivite if you see it as a distinct cult within Sanatan Dharma). The fact is that she had no reason to seek further direction or spiritual succour from any visiting divine or preacher belonging to a faith other than her own. All the so-called evidence given by the Muslim scholar to prove her conversion to Islam is nothing but an unacceptable tissue of lies.

I should like to mention a few scholars from our own community who have made some observations on Lalla that don't seem tenable. They seem to have supposed or imagined that she played the role of a committed social activist, a professional preacher or teacher of spiritual values and brought about fusion of diverse creeds and schools of thought. Forgetting that Lal Ded didn't compose her vaakhs as professional poets compose and publish their verses today, they draw their own inferences on which they base very facile and untenable views as if Lalla meant to preach and propagate a philosophy of her own through her vaakhs. Here are the two examples that Professor Jayalal Kaul has questioned in Chapter 5 of his book on Lal Ded :

(i) She brought about a "synthesis of the two philosophies" (the Trika and Islamic Sufism) and this synthesis "was given to the world in poetic sermons by the wandering minstrel through the rest of her life" (See "Daughters of Vitasta" by

Prem Nath Bazaz, Pamposh Publications, New Delhi, 1959, p. 129).

(ii) "The order she founded was an admixture of the non-dualistic philosophy of Saivism and Islamic Sufism" (See "A History of Kashmir" by P.N.K. Bamzai, Metropolitan Delhi, 1962, p. 498). Again, in the view of Daya Krishen Kachru "Lalleshwari took the best of Islamic thought and fused it best with her own creed". (See Daya Krishen Kachru, "The Light of the Valley" Koshur Samachar, 1971, Lal Ded Number, p. 7). This is also questionable, especially the way it is worded.

Lalla's vaakhs convey a message of peace and harmony and one can see that she owes it as much to her educational background in a Shaivite Kashmiri Brahman family as to her spiritual enlightenment based on her own sadhana. There is a definite impress of the Shaivite thought and terminology on her vaakhs. Whatever her background, there is also evidence in the vaakhs of a state of awareness and of an outlook far transcending cults. Her teaching is, in fact, in tune with our Sanatan Dharma that is exceptionally catholic and all-embracing, acceptable as much to the emancipated Hindu as it should be to the liberal Muslim. It is her direct "encounter" with the ultimate truth as a true yogini or mystic that explains why Lalla vaakh appeals to men of all shades of religious thought (inasmuch as all religious paths lead to the same goal). When scholars read her vaakhs with pre-conceived notions, they interpret them to convey that Lalla aimed at achieving a fusion or synthesis of Vedantic philosophy and Islamic Sufism, as if with a conscious purpose (reflective of her outlook as a thinker and intellectual).

Professor Jayalal Kaul has been consistent in his description of Lal Ded as a Shaivite yogini. In this connection, he has been at pains to clarify in what ways Trika and Vedanta are distinguishable as non-dualistic philosophies. In

particular, he characterizes Shankara Vedanta as illusionist and praises the Shaivite philosophy of Kashmir for its view of the world as real. As a student of the Gita and on the basis of my reading of some of the Upanishads (in English translation), I don't find Vedanta altogether distinct from Trika. Both philosophies are rooted in the Vedas and are complementary to each other. If according to Trika the world is real, a manifestation of the swarupa, doesn't Lord Krishna affirm the same truth in the Gita?

बहुनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानान मां प्रपद्यते
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः

[Shloka 19, Chap. 7]

At the end of many births (of striving), the knowing one makes Me his refuge, realizing that Vasudeva is All. A great soul of that type is rare to find.

So we see, as the Lord tells us in the, Gita, "वासुदेव सर्वमिति" (All is Vasudeva), implying that God inheres in what we see as the external world, which is as such real–a manifestation of God. This is what Trika also emphasizes. In the Shivastotravali, Utpaldeva–celebrated Kashmiri Shaivite philosopher and poet–gives equal importance to seeing Shiva as विश्वमय (immanent in the world) as विश्वोत्तीर्ण (transcendent or beyond the phenomenal world). As a devotee of Shiva, he wants to have शिवाभास (consciousness of the Supreme Self) in the wakeful state–while experiencing the world through the senses, and not merely when he is absorbed in meditation. If there were no compatibility between Shaivism and Vedanta, Abhinava Gupta (famous Kashmiri Shaivite philosopher after Utpaldeva), would not have attempted an interpretation of the Gita in terms of the Trika philosophy.

A word about Shankaracharya, who is branded an illusionist by some Shaivites. We must not forget that he is also credited with being the author of the Sanskrit work titled Saundarya Lahari. What is *mayavaad* for the Vedantin assumes the form of ***shaktivaad in*** the book mentioned as Shankara's point of view undergoes a change. In a Sanskrit poem attributed to him, he uses the line "चिदानंद रूप: शिवोऽहं शिवोऽहं" as the refrain and a statement that a Shaivite believes to be very true of the Self. I feel that the Lal Ded scholar must avoid seeing the saint and poet as an exponent of only a particular school of thought–Trika. So long as Lalla is a poet (and she is so pre-eminently), she cannot afford to be rigorously doctrinal as a systematic philosopher. No doubt, many of her vaakhs have the preacher's tone. She is a seeker *too in* a number of the vaakhs; her poetry is mystical as the poetry of aspiration as well as of fulfilment. If we over-stress Lalla's being a Shaivite poet, we then overlook her catholicity. In *one of* her vaakhs she says clearly that she sees Shiva as no different from Keshava. How true she sounds when she says "अभ्यासुँके गनिरय श्यास्तुँर मऽठिम" (I forgot the shastras as my spiritual practice gained in depth and intensity). And as Lalla's practice advanced, as she went up the ladder of meditation and crossed all the hurdles–negotiated the *chakras* –her utterances became spontaneous as mystical outpourings, coming straight from the heart. What interestingly cannot escape our attention is that even when she has the preacher's tone in some of her vaakhs, she is not overtly didactic, we don't see a "palpable" design in the whole body of her verse-sayings. That explains why her poetry is soul-stirring.

Finally, it is the vaakhs of Lal Ded–that are aphoristic and, as such, loaded with wisdom–on which her great popularity as a mystical poet largely rests. And she is a great poet precisely because she is intensely spiritual and, conversely,

she is highly spiritual because she is gifted with an extraordinary poetic sensibility. The vaakhs bear testimony to Lalla's genius as a saint and poet in one. What the American literary critic, Helen C. White, remarks about the mystic poet is unreservedly applicable to Lal Ded as a poet:

"It is not a strange hybrid of poet and mystic who writes a mystical poem. It is not a man who writes first as a mystic and then as a poet. It is not even a mystic who turns over to the poet who happens to dwell within the same brain and body the materials of his insight to be made into a work of art by the competent craftsman. It is rather that the same human being is at once poet and mystic, at one and the same time from the beginning of the process to the end. (The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience, 1936, New York, p. 22).

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CHAPTER 3

LAL DED : HER SPIRITUALISM AND PRESENT SCIENTIFIC WORLD ORDER

PROF. S. BHATT

In the remote 14th century and in an obscure part of the history of Kashmir there lived Lal Ded (Lalleshwari) during the period 1320 to 1390. In her lifetime she came to be recognized as a goddess, a seer, who had descended upon this earth with a divine message for mankind. Lal Ded did not have a Boswell to record her performance in life, nor was there a Swami Vivekananda to carry forward her spiritual philosophy to the world at large. By sheer force of her sayings (vaakhs), Lal Ded has survived in history and is remembered in every home in Kashmir with all communities claiming her blessings.

To the scholars of this volume, and to the participants of this Seminar being held by Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society and N.S. Kashmir Research Institute, there is an opportunity to indeed interpret to the world once again the range of ideas that this goddess had come to convey in somewhat adverse circumstances of her life. She had an uncomfortable family life and her community was being

exterminated by the Muslim fundamentalist rulers in Kashmir. Seldom has history produced such a seer who has shone like a light in the troubled history of over 500 years in Kashmir from 14th century onwards when Pandits were reduced to eleven families at one time, as is recorded in the history of Kashmir.[1] As Professor Jayalal Kaul, an outstanding scholar, says in his perceptive volume on the saint-poetess : "Lal Ded is undoubtedly one of the greatest spiritual geniuses of the world."[2]

New Cosmic Vision

The world today is in search of a new cosmic vision, universal in scope, and based on modern philosophy of science and Eastern mysticism. This is the opinion of many scholars including the President of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel. In a widely acclaimed address in USA some time ago, Havel said that only such a new cosmic vision can save this civilization from its present problems of clash of civilizations.[3]

A leading scholar, Samuel P. Huntington from USA, whose book, "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" has received worldwide attention says, for example, that "The United States, Europe, Russia and India have thus become engaged in a truly global struggle against China, Japan and most of Islam."[4] The book ends with the plea that mankind should seek commonality of different civilizations of the world. The author had said while on a visit to India that the proxy war by Pakistan in Kashmir was an extension of the global extremist Muslim fundamentalism which is clashing with the pluralistic and composite culture of India.

I am a student of international law and global order. I am involved extensively in the study of problems of environment and ecological balance, in a sustainable world order, in peace and harmony of mankind et al. My concern

is also to promote the unity of mankind as of religions. I have also seen in recent years widespread concern of man for mysticism and inner spiritual development and the quest for harmony with nature.

I have briefly studied the vaakhs (sayings) of Lal Ded as also the translation provided by eminent scholars like late Prof. Jayalal Kaul, Prof. B.N. Parimoo and Mr. Nil Kanth Kotru. I shall attempt to describe a few vaakhs and Lal Ded's philosophy contained in the vaakhs for the unity of life, unity of religions, mysticism and inner spiritual development, and harmony of world. Indeed as a student of science, I see in the present world order these principles being pursued by mankind for global progress and peace. As the scientists dream of world law and global order, so do the seers like Lal Ded. Even Albert Einstein says that ancient seers could grasp reality because of their pure thought or what we call pure consciousness.

Therefore, Lal Ded has explained some truths in her vaakhs as if they are divine messages. Their freshness is perennial. Their truth is eternal and more appropriate to the modern world. Let us consider some such principles enunciated by her. She pronounced her vaakhs because of her quest for understanding nature and the cosmic process, and concern for a better world order.

Unity of Life and Non-Life

Lal Ded says in Vaakh 33, partly reproduced below with English translation by Pandit J.L. Kaul :

So when the sun of pure consciousness shines,
The world of living and lifeless things,
The universe and whatever exists,
Are, in the Supreme, seen as one.

Here Lal Ded provides connection between the world of living and lifeless things. Thus the parts of environment in the universe are interdependent. Mankind has in 1972 in Stockholm made a Declaration on the Human Environment wherein it is said that man is part of nature and there is intrinsic connection between life and non-life parts of environment. The above Declaration has brought forth what is called the Global Environment Movement. Furthermore, it calls for the unity of life on this planet. The anthropologists have called attention to mankind being one species - homo sapien. Margaret Mead, among others, has said that the variety in human species is a source of strength to the entire species.[5] Modem day planning of human societies is based on the truth that Lal Ded said over six hundred years ago, that there is a unity of all species and all forms of life and non-life. The essential thing for us is to grasp this unity through pure consciousness. The United Nations has taken further steps to seek man's harmony with nature. In 1982, a "Charter for Nature" has been drawn for all nations and people to follow. The theme of this Charter is to seek unity and harmony with the nature. Nature provides means for social, economic and spiritual growth, says the Charter.

Unity of Religions

The United Nations held recently a world conference of religions to seek inter-faith harmony among peoples of the world. Theologians and spiritual leaders presented a document to the Secretary General of the United Nations called "Commitment to Global Peace". The General Assembly was crowded by religious leaders for 96 hours. The leaders declared that they will seek harmony for mankind and help solve problems of world.[6]

Lal Ded as a seer has said in one of her Vaakhs that there is one God and one should not distinguish between a Muslim and a Hindu. She says:

Shiv chhuy thali-thali rāzān...

Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere:
Then do not discriminate between
A Hindu or a Musalman,
If thou art wise, know thyself,
That is true knowledge of the Lord.[7]

Thus Lal Ded is accepted as a spiritual leader by all faiths. As Prof. J.L. Kaul records:

"Indeed, she helped us, Kashmiris, to discover our mother tongue and our soul as a people... That is why there is not a Kashmiri, Hindu and Musalman, who has not some of her Vaakh on the tip of his tongue, and who does not reverence her memory".[8]

Prof. Jayalal Kaul goes on to describe that Lal Ded has established a tradition of harmony and tolerance "which is our priceless heritage".[9] Indeed Kaul cites three outstanding sages of Kashmir who being seers themselves accepted Lal Ded as a divine being and a great spiritual force. These seers belonged to both Hindu and Muslim religions. The foremost tribute comes from Sheikh Nur-ud-din Rishi whose immortal stanza on Lal Ded is recalled here:

That Lalla of Padmanpore—
She drank her fill of divine nectar;
She was indeed an avtaar of ours
O God, grant me the self-same boon!"[10]

Other seers whom Kaul cites are Rupa Bhawani [1625-1721] who regarded Lal Ded as her guru, Parmanand (1791-1879) and Shams Faqir (1843-1904) who both acknowledged her great spiritual status.[11]

Indeed one can say with historic insight that Lal Ded has established a composite culture and a common spirituality

of mankind for over six hundred years. Her contribution to common spiritual life is based upon her vaakhs and the philosophy of living contained in her sayings. Hindus and Musalmans to this day follow her dicta. Indeed a Western scholar, Walter R. Lawrence, in his scholarly treatise, 'The Valley of Kashmir', first published in 1895, records:

"I have shown in my chapter on customs how certain ideas are common to the Hindus and Musalmans of Kashmir, but I attribute much of the delightful tolerance which exists between the followers of the two religions chiefly to the fact that the Kashmiri Musalman never really gave up the old Hindu religion of the country".[12]

Lawrence refers to saint-worship in Kashmir which is common among the two communities. Sometimes they both worship a saint of either religion such as a Hindu saint, Rishi Pir, or Nund Rishi, the latter a Muslim. Therefore Lal Ded has successfully established an everlasting spiritual philosophy of tolerance of religions which was followed and further elaborated by Muslim saints. In my own childhood whenever I visited my mother's birth place - matamal - in Tulamulla, Kashmir, my grandmother, Rajrani Devi, would take me to a great Muslim saint, Akram Shah Saheb, who lived nearby, for his blessings. This was apart from my intense prayers at Ragya Mandir at Khir Bhawani held in high esteem by both Hindus and Muslims. In 1999, on my visit to Kashmir, I did visit the site of my matamal in Tulamulla even though Hindus in Tulamulla have been forced to leave by militant forces, and an elderly Kashmiri Muslim lady offered for me prayers in the name of Ragya Devi. Tolerance of religions is found in the soil of Kashmir and in the gene and hearts of the people of Kashmir. This common love of all religions cannot be wished away by fundamentalist forces currently operating from outside the valley of Kashmir. Religious

tolerance is of course largely a legacy of Lal Ded from the fourteenth century onwards.

So, cannot this group of scholars attending this seminar take up this theme of inter-faith harmony of which Lal Ded speaks in her vaakhs? Cannot we, in the context of the United Nations conference on religious harmony, carry her message to the world at large? Time will soon come, when the people of Kashmir, fed up by militarism and narrow fundamentalism, will rekindle this inter-religious faith that Lal Ded started and Nund Rishi and others carried forward. It can be a worldwide spiritual movement that mankind is awaiting. Indeed, it will once again open up floodgates of harmony and love in Kashmir and the rest of India and the world.

Mysticism and Non-Renunciation

Until recently mysticism was despised for being some obscure and unscientific discipline and not a part of human nature. Albert Einstein after many centuries from Newton revived mysticism by his many celebrated utterances. He said of mysticism:

"The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science"[13]

Mysticism is, therefore, a search for the unknown. It involves dreaming about nature's mysteries. The scientist dreams, the seer also dreams. Indeed in the post-Einstein period, mysticism has acquired a new dimension and the philosophy of science has moved on towards a non-mechanist view of the world by the scientists. Prof. Ilya Prigogine, who won a Noble Prize in Physics in 1977 on thermodynamics of natural systems has done ample work on describing this change in the philosophy of science. His book, "Order Out of Chaos", is worth reading. Here Alvin Toffler in his foreword

says that "we are becoming more and more conscious of the fact that on all levels, from elementary particles to cosmology, randomness and irreversibility play an ever-increasing role. Science is rediscovering time".[14]

Prigogine himself speaks of mysticism :

"Today the balance is strongly shifting towards a revival of mysticism, be it in the press media or even in science itself, especially among cosmologists. It has even been suggested that certain physicists and popularizers of science that mysterious relationships exist between parapsychology and quantum physics."[15]

Prigogine talks of profound change in the scientific concept of nature. Indeed he seems to endorse the view of Tagore who during his discourse with Einstein on the meaning of Reality said that "even if absolute truth could exist, it would be inaccessible to the human mind". Einstein had emphasized that "science had to be independent of the existence of any observer".[16]

Thus we find new and very perceptive books being well-received by the scientific community which provide a thematic approach to science, a theme to provide a bridge for human understanding. Gerald Holton's book "Thematic Origin of Scientific Thought From Kepler to Einstein" is a profound contribution in this direction. With a new emphasis on mysticism, and a thematic approach to science, the world is witnessing a new dialogue between mysticism practiced by seers like Lal Ded that produces pure consciousness in human beings and the new science of philosophy. Lal Ded's vaakhs are replete with mysticism of nature. Human being is a part of nature. Thus by practicing Omkar, Lal Ded says, one can bridge the gap between self and cosmic consciousness. Some writers like Mr. M.K. Kaw, the President of Kashmir

Education, Culture and Science Society, have called attention to the dynamic equilibrium of Vedanta that provides pure consciousness. He calls it the science of spiritualism.[17] Lal Ded also calls for achieving pure consciousness by the practice of yoga. After all she feels that yoga is the realization of God from within. The kingdom of God is within you, says Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Lal Ded has shown close nexus between mysticism and observing reality in the universe. She has spurred scientists to combine scientific search with search for spirituality and pure consciousness. Science and spiritualism of Vedanta are seen as one and inter-dependent entities.

Non-Renunciation

Lal Ded provides in her vaakhs an inspiration to be a householder. She is not in favour of renunciation. However, while being a householder, one has to live with certain precepts. Most important for a householder, she says, is to do good to keep away from anger and greed, to be humble, to dedicate all works to God, to constantly practice the mantras of God. She gives a call to arise, ascend to higher levels of spirituality, to develop pure consciousness, and to live in the present.

In retrospect, to the Kashmiri Pandits (KPs) in particular, Lal Ded, provides the anthropology, a way of life and growth and the values that we the KPs have imbibed in history to this day. We the KPs tend to be spiritual while living a householder's life. Indeed one of our foremost sociologist, Prof. T.N. Madan, has written a book on the subject of non-renunciation and elaborated in detail the practices of Kashmiri Pandits in their social and cultural life.[18] No wonder that Lal Ded occupies a pre-eminent place out of all saints of Kashmir among the KPs.

Tributes to Lal Ded

A large number of writers in Kashmir have written about Lal Ded, her vaakhs, and her philosophy. Of these, a good number of authors are Muslim scholars. Prof. Jayalal Kaul who carried out extensive research on the topic has cited in the bibliography of his book, "Lal Ded", a large number of authors, some of them foreign scholars. Among prominent scholars and books on Lal Ded, mention may be made of Anand Kaul who wrote in 1924 in the journal "Antiquary", Avtar Krishan Rahbar, Premnath Bazaz in his book "Daughters of Vitasta", Gopi Nath Raina, J.L. Kaul Jalali, "Kalam-i-Lalla Arifa" edited by Qazi Nizam-ud-din, Lal Ded Number of "Koshur Samachar", 1971, published by Kashmiri Samiti, Delhi, "Lal Ded" by J.L. Kaul and N.L. Kaul Talib, "Lalla Vakyani" by Sir George Grierson and Lionel D. Barnett in 1920, "Nurnama" edited by Amin Kamil in 1966. "The Word of Lalla" by Sir Richard Temple, 1924, P.N.K. Bamezai in his book "History of Kashmir" 1962, Shankar Lal Kaul, "Mother Lal of Kashmir", Sir Aurel Stein in Rajatarangni, Vol. I, et al.

In recent period, we have three books written on Lal Ded, the first by Prof. Jayalal Kaul for Sahitya Akademi in 1973. "The Ascent of Self" by Dr. B.N. Parimoo in 1978, and "Lal Ded : Her Life and Sayings" by Nil Kanth Kotru in 1989.

Prof. Jayalal Kaul

It is recognized in academic world that Prof. Jayalal Kaul produced a comprehensive book after a lot of research work on Lal Ded in 1973. The book published by Sahitya Akademi has various chapters on the life and legend of Lal Ded, the text of Lal vaakhs, on Lal Ded's role as the maker of Kashmiri language, on Lal Ded and her times and an appraisal by Prof. Jayalal Kaul himself.

Prof. Jayalal Kaul's work on Lal Ded is most outstanding. It provides all aspects of Lal Ded's life and her contribution to the development of soul and culture of Kashmir. It includes her role in the making of Kashmiri language and literature, her poetry, her higher spiritual attainments, and her role in promoting harmony and tolerance of religions.

I personally pay my highest and humble tribute to Prof. Jayalal Kaul on this occasion. He was a genius of our society who has in the highest scholarly traditions dealt with the subject in deep historical perspective. He has collected some of the vaakhs from various sources, including the word of the mouth, and analyzed them for us. He was himself endowed with great spiritual insight, and was a poet himself. I was fortunate to be in contact with him while I edited a book entitled "Kashmiri Pandits: A Cultural Heritage". Prof. Kaul was requested by me to send an article for the book. And he was kind to provide one on Lal Ded. He wrote his last letter to me in December, 1986 on the subject and expired shortly thereafter.

His article on Lal Ded was received after his death. It was published in the above mentioned book, being the first chapter out of 111.

All the participants of this Seminar would like to pay their humble tributes to Prof. Kaul who represented all the virtues of this great Kashmiri Pandit community.

I wish to offer my respectful comments to the other two learned authors, Dr. B.N. Parimoo, and Pt. Nil Kanth Kotru, who have brought out very scholarly volumes on Lal Ded. I am sure other scholars in this Seminar will further analyze their views and reflections on the life and times of Lal Ded.

In a period when Lal Ded's spiritual philosophy is bound to create a new cosmic vision for mankind, when her role for Kashmiri language, literature and poetry is bound to strengthen Kashmiri ethos and culture (Kashmiriat), the writings of Prof. J.L. Kaul, Dr. B.N. Parimoo and Nil Kanth Kotru will be read with fresh intellectual curiosity. Indeed, the participants of this Seminar and the Convener Dr. S.S. Toshkhani, himself an erudite scholar on Lal Ded and Kashmiri literature, have an important duty to convey to the world Lal Ded's message of harmony, religious tolerance and creative progress based on her life and her vaakhs - her verse-sayings. Seldom has the world seen in flesh and blood a divine being in the form of a human being merged with the cosmic pure consciousness and conveying to the mankind the finer points on spiritualism and on householders' daily life. The present world order will greatly benefit by her philosophy. Let us try to convey this to the world community.

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CHAPTER 4

RECONSTRUCTING AND REINTERPRETING LAL DED

DR. S.S. TOSHKHANI

Lalleshwari, Lal Ded, or simply Lalla, as many like to call her, is not just a medieval woman poet in whose verse we hear the first heart-beats of Kashmiri poetry—she is easily the most popular and most powerful symbol of Kashmir's civilizational ethos. While her 'vaaks' or verse-sayings continue to dazzle us with their high wattage incandescence, her role as a spiritual leader who resolved the crisis of her times caused by a clash of two belief and value systems—one indigenous and the other alien—cannot but be regarded as momentous, whether or not history recognizes its true significance. In both these capacities it was her intervention that ensured continuity and saved indigenous cultural structures from a total collapse at a time when the advent of Islam in Kashmir was accompanied by an unprecedented political and social upheaval.

If Lal Ded's immense impact on the Kashmiri mind has practically remained undiminished despite the passage of almost seven centuries, it is essentially because of the fusion of the poet and the saint in her, or, to use the words of Dileep

Chitre (which he has used for another great Bhakti poet, Tukaram), because of "a poet's vision of spirituality and a saint's vision of poetry" that she presents in her verses. We are amazed at her deep sense of compassion, her mystical insights and spiritual vision, her profound awareness of the human condition and her Shaiva-world view which makes her look at existence as manifestation of one, indivisible, consciousness. More than anything else, we are indebted to her for shaping the Kashmiri language in a way that it formed the basis for the Kashmiris to forge their indigenous cultural identity.

Ironically, this very image of Lal Ded as a spiritual giant and poetic genius fused into one–reinforced by the many hagiographical accounts, myths and legends surrounding her–has led to attempts at appropriating her for ideologies and causes totally alien to her thinking and temperament. We thus come across not one but several image constructs of the saint–poetess, some of them mutually irreconcilable, linked inextricably with predilections, perceptions and motives of those who have created them. And these tend to blur and distort facts about her life, making it extremely difficult for us to arrive at what we can call an authentic Lal Ded–a flesh and blood Lal Ded occupying a specific space and time in history, or at least a poetic version of what Lal Ded was or must actually have been like. With whims, fancies and notions being the basis of these various constructs, we are left with the problems of exploring the true dimensions of her creativity and of locating the real founts of her inspiration. And this cannot be settled by mere interpretations of scholarly differences or semantic hair-splitting. The task has been made immensely complicated by the intervention of nearly seven hundred years of history about which people are still hesitant to talk freely and openly.

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the image constructs of the saint-poetess which are patently false, and have no basis in facts, but are passed on as products of genuine scholarship. These images and fabrications are being circulated persistently with surprising frequency not out of any desire to present the truth, but to suppress it. The most formidable attempt to appropriate Lal Ded in this manner comes from those who want to snatch her for Islam. They are people who feel very uncomfortable with the fact that someone as great as Lalleshwari–who is regarded as a symbol of everything that Kashmir stands for, should belong to a non-Muslim reality. Masquerading as scholars but motivated and conditioned by their religious reflexes, they try to subvert this fact by floating imaginary anecdotes about her conversion to Islam. One such anecdote that continues to be repeated with total disregard to historical plausibility is that she met Sayyid Mir Ali Hamadani, the Islamic missionary most revered by Kashmiri Muslims, and received "spiritual enlightenment" from him. Sayyid Hamadani had come to Kashmir with a large entourage of fellow Sayyids to escape the wrath of Timur and there he engaged in proselytizing activities on a massive scale. Prof. Jaya Lal Kaul has in his brilliantly researched book "Lal Ded" very convincingly proved the utter impossibility of such a meeting having ever taken place. Referring to Persian sources, he has quoted Mohammad Azam Dedamari's explicit statement that the story of her being present before the Sayyid "has not been held as proved by scholars". Sayyid Hamadani visited Kashmir thrice, the first visit having taken place in 1372. And if Lal Ded died in the reign of Shihab-ud-din, as Persian chronicles point out, he could in no way have influenced her. Persian chronicler Peer Ghulam Hassan, too makes no mention of a meeting between Lal Ded and Sayyid Mir Ali Hamadani, but states that she did indeed meet Jalal-ud-din Bukhari and Sayyid

Hussain Samanani and it was at his hands that she was "converted" to Islam. 'Bibi Lalla Arifa', a pamphlet published from Lahore, to which Prof. Jayalal Kaul has referred, is more categorical, saying that she accepted Islam at the hands of Sayyid Hussain Samanani. "This should be obvious to all", the pamphlet adds, emphasizing the claim and giving a fanciful account of the supposed meeting. According to the pamphlet, Lal Ded ran for miles together to receive Sayyid Samanani at Shopian and "being elated to receive the secret doctrine, became his chief disciple". Repudiating this claim which Sufi, the author of "Kashir", a history of Kashmir published from Pakistan, says is based on "Lalla Arifa's own later day vaaks," Prof. Kaul writes: "Not a single verse-saying of hers has been discovered up to date even among the doubtful and spurious verse-sayings ascribed to her which would bear out either this anecdote or similar other anecdotes concerning her".

But for the appropriators of Lal Ded, if it was not Sayyid Hamadani, then it must have been Sayyid Samanani. Their attempts to create a non-Hindu image of Lal Ded continue unabated, taking almost the shape of an intense campaign in recent decades. A special Lal Ded Number (1979) of Sheeraza, a journal published by the Jammu and Kashmir State Art Culture and Languages, for instance, is illustrative of this obsession which shows itself in article after article obviously with the editor's tacit agreement. One such article "Lal Ded Shah Hamadan ke Huzoor Mein" (Lal Ded in the Presence of Shah Hamadan), written by Mufti Jalal-ud-din, says, "It does not matter whether these anecdotes are corroborated by history or not. It is eventually popular belief that settles the issue". Jalal-ud-din's is not just an individual opinion–it represents a whole mindset that shows no signs of changing even today. The people who possess it are not interested in Lal Ded's creative genius or the profundity of

her thought nor do they care about her humanitarian legacy. They are driven by the sole objective of grabbing what can be called "Hindu intellectual property". That is why they show Lal Ded running towards a baker's oven desperate to cover her nudity as she had seen a "man" when she supposedly encountered Sayyid Hamadani. The miracle of the oven is surely prompted by a hegemonistic design to establish the superiority of Islam over the creed of the "infidels". Sayyid Hamadani was on a proselytizing mission and what bigger fish could there have been for him to cast his net ?

The Sufi image that some have tried to foist on Lal Ded, is also a mischievous and motivated construct as it is virtually an attempt to de-Hinduise her and to create confusion about her faith. The man who began it all, though not exactly with that intention, Sir Richard Temple, appears indeed to have been a confused person, saying different things at different places. At one place he says that Lalla was a Shaivite Hindu and at another place he discovers that "she deeply and quickly absorbed the Sufi line of thought after her contact with her contemporary and friend" Sayyid Ali Hamadani. Soon afterwards he counts similarities in "the doctrine and practice of Naqshbandis and the Yogic exercises of the Hindu Shaivas". Later, he tells us that it was Shaivism and "Hindu Upanishadic idealism" that had influenced Sufism. If that be the truth then how is it that she is influenced by Sufism as preached by Sayyid Ali Hamadani? Why not directly by Hindu Upanishadic thought? If Sayyid Hamadani was at all a Sufi, he was not of the type who would believe in the doctrine of Wahadat-ul-Wujud or oneness of existence and certainly not in universal brotherhood and love. The humiliating and degrading conditions he laid down in his book "Zakhirat-ul-Muluk" to guide a Sultan in treating his non-Muslim subjects are enough to prove this. The various Sufi orders said to have been introduced during that time

in Kashmir were all orthodox in nature, preaching strict adherence to *Shariah* and not liberal humanism as is made out to be. They remained confined to the correct practice of the Quaranic beliefs and "hardly came out of *zuhd, ibadat, taqwa* and *riyadat*, the limits set by their founders", having nothing to do with the type of Sufism based on the doctrine of Mohi-ud-din ibn Arabi. Their emphasis was on proselytization and not on the belief in unity of being and universal love.

Writers like P.N.K. Bamzai and Dr. R.K. Parmu, who followed Richard Temple in his queer conclusions, created further confusion by making even stranger and mutually contradictory statements. "Lalleshwari's association with Shah Hamadan", writes Bamzai, "was due to an identity of the faith of Sufis and Hindu mendicants and saints in Kashmir", adding that "the order she founded was an admixture of the non-dualistic philosophy of Shaivism and Islamic Sufism". One is at a loss to understand what one can make of such pronouncements which have nothing to do with history or facts of Lal Ded's life. In what way was "the faith of the Hindu mendicants and saints of Kashmir" different from that followed by the general mass of the people ? And which religious or philosophical order was founded by Lal Ded? The word "admixture" leaves one stumped, but even before one recovers one finds him saying in the same breath that Shaivism, "the dominant religion of the time", was "ossified into a set of complicated rituals". Did the "Hindu mendicants", he refers to follow any other religion then?

Dr. R.K. Parmu is even more sweeping in his statements, blissfully ignorant of how they contradict each other. Branding the entire Hindu society of Lal Ded's time as "corrupt", he tells us that "Lal Ded preached against the Shaiva religion as it was practiced by the Tantric gurus of those times". Did

she really? And who were these "Tantric gurus" any way? But wait, Dr. Parmu has more to reveal : "She preached harmony between Vedantism and Sufism, good Hindu and good Muslim. What are the sources that he and Bamzai rely upon to make such pronouncements? Which of Lal Ded's *vaakhs* testifies to this? Or, which historical source? Or can just whims and notions replace historical investigation?

Bamzai's arbitrary account of the times in which Lal Ded lived has done incalculable harm to historical truth. If he is to be believed, the "pious lives" that Sufi saints of that period lived had the Hindus so charmed that they decided to embrace Islam en masse ! Of course, by implication all others led impious lives. Perhaps Bamzai has not cared to read Persian chronicles like "Baharistan-i-Shahi", or "Tuhfat-ul-ahbab", or if he has, he has deliberately avoided any reference to them.

There are several verses of Lal Ded in which she refers to her attainment of self-realization and spiritual enlightenment. For her it is a real experience of life. There is no shadow of doubt or uncertainty about it in her mind. And, what is more, there is a tone of tremendous self-confidence and assurance in her verses when she tells us about her mystical illumination. As, for instance, in these lines :

Samsārās āyas tapasī
Bōdhú prakāshú lōbum sahaj
–Into this universe of birth I came
By Yoga gained the self revealing light !

(Trs. Nila Cram Cook)

Lōlúki·nārú vaàlinj buzúm
shankar lōbum tamī suúty

–My heart I parched as farmers parch the grain
And from that fire there came a wondrous boon
And Shiva in a flash I did obtain

(*Trs. Nila Cram Cook*)

lal bŏ tsāyas swaman bagú baras
vuchhum shivas shakath mīlth tú vāh
tati lay karúm arnrit saras
zinday maras tu karyam kyāh

–I, Lalla, entered through the door of the garden of my mind
And saw Shiva and Shakti united into one, O joy!
There I became immersed in the lake of nectar
And died even while I was still alive
What will now death do unto me ?

adú lali myĕ pradvúm param gath
–And then I, Lalla, attained the supreme state.

And if that is the case, why hasn't anyone asked so far what need had Lal Ded to go to a Sayyid Hamadani or a Sayyid Samnani, or anyone else for that matter, to become his *"murid-e-khas"*? You cannot disregard or dilute the Shaiva metaphysical content in her thought by harping on such stories and fabrications. The secret of her phenomenal popularity, even during her own lifetime, was the great spiritual heights she had attained and this greatness sometimes gave her courage to even question her own Guru :

gwaras pritshyōm sāsi laṭē
yas nú kĕnh vanān tas kyāh nāv
pritshān pritshān thàchis tú lūsús
kĕnhas nishi kyāh tāny drāv

A thousand times did I my Guru ask
What is the name of the one who can't be named
And asking again and again I tired myself out
How has something come out of nothing?

One cannot imagine how someone like her could have submitted meekly before the Sayyid missionaries at the fag end of her life and agree to give up her life long faith? Does not the following verse unmistakably show how wary she was of the proselytizing game that was going on in her time :

hā tsyattā kavú chhuy lŏgmut par mas
kavú gŏy apúzis pazyuk brōnth
dushi bŏz vash kŏrnakh para dharmas. .....

—O mind, why do you feel intoxicated by someone else's wine?
Why do you mistake the unreal for the real?
Weak mindedness has let you to be overcome by others' faith.

In another vaakh, Lal Ded says of herself: "Lalla merged herself in the light of pure consciousness *(chitta jyoti)* by means of the mysterious syllable Om, and thus did away with the fear of death". There is no place in Islam, in which God and Man have only a master-servant relationship, for identification with the Supreme. Nor do orthodox Sufi orders entertain such thought. Mansur had to pay with his life for saying "ana'I haq" (I am Truth).

What then is the source of Lal Ded's mysticism? Where from does it derive if not from Sufism? Prof. Jaya Lal Kaul and Prof. B.N. Parimu have very clearly shown how the Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir forms the basis of her thought. "As I find", writes Prof. Kaul, "there is a remarkable correspondence between the experience of Lal Ded as given in Lalla Vaakh and that of Shaiva Siddhas as related in their

Trikashastras... This should undeniably prove that she was a Shaiva Yogini, not only because she uses, whenever she needs to use them, the technical terms only of Trika Darshana but, more so, because of her concept of God, her Yoga technique her own *anubhava*, direct perception and experience - all these are of Trika system." Prof. Parimu is equally specific : "The key to Lalla's mysticism is the Shivadvaita or the Trika philosophy of Kashmir". The mystic strain that is so prominent in Lal Ded's poetry, in fact, combines her quest for gnostic illumination with the depth of emotional experience. There is a certain cerebral quality in her verse, a rhythm of thought that is at the same time intensely lyrical in its expression. In his book "Triadic Mysticism", Paul E. Murphy calls her the "chief exponent of devotional or emotion-oriented Triadism". He writes: "Three significant representatives of devotionalism emerged in Kashmir in the five hundred years between the last half of the ninth and the end of the fourteenth centuries, they were : Bhatta Narayana, Utpaldeva and Lalla. Predominant in all three is the advocation of a path of love unencumbered by techniques and means."

Bhatta Narayana, the direct disciple of Vasugupta, wrote the *Stava Chintamani* in the 9th century. The work, which Murphy calls "a love poem", has 120 verses on the communion between Shiva and Shakti "under the form of Prakasha and Vimarsha or Light and Self-Awareness". Utpala, who according to Lilian Silburn was "both mystic and genius, powerful metaphyscian, astute psychologist and above all, great poet", and "next to Abhinavagupta the most notable and audacious figure of the Self-Awareness {*patibhijna*) School", wrote *Shiva Stotravali*, described by Murphy as" the most beautiful of Shaiva love songs written in an intensely touching though simple style". Lal Ded, whose verses record her own mystic life, shares with these two Shaiva poets, who preceded her,

a sharp feeling of the immediate presence of Shiva, the Divine Being. The poetry of all the three of them stems from "an intense resignation to the divine will", and reflects their vivacity, originality and deep sincerity. There is a striking similarity in many passages of theirs which can be compared for their "emotions, intoxications and sufferings", and the metaphors and images that express these. For instance, Utpala in his mystic ardour and with a mind inflamed by powerful longing approaches Shiva, the compassionate Lord, to attain communion with him and clenches Him with an impassioned cry and "holds Him in his fist":

"Here you are, I hold you in my fist! Here You are, I've seen You–where are You fleeing?"

[*Stavachintamani*, Trs. Paul E. Murphy]

This has a perfect parallel in Lalla, who evokes the same image in this expression of hers:

àndryum prakāsh nyabar tshŏț um
gați rŏț um tú karmas thaph!

–I diffused outside the light that lit-up within me
And in that darkness I seized Him and held Him tight!

Images and metaphors relating to the concept of Shiva's self-luminosity abound in Shaiva devotional poets, and the *gata* or "darkness" that Lal Ded refers to is the dark Mystical Night of anguish and suffering which ultimately leads to the Night of Undifferentiatedness.

Bhatta Narayana uses the image of the dark cavern of heart where "darkness is dissipated on all sides by the Brightness Supreme". Here too there is a striking similarity in the words "the interior cavern" used by Bhatta Narayana and "*andryum*" the "inner" (light) that Lal Ded has used.

Lala Ded expresses her mystical feelings–the pangs of separation from Shiva, the passionate urge to unite with Him, the desperate quest and the frustration of losing the direction, the difficulties of the path, the intensity of suffering which only strengthens her determination to seem Him face to face and possess Him, the total surrender of will and the ecstasy of the final beatitude–in imager and metaphors that are powerful and stunningly beautiful :

lal bŏ drāyas lŏlarē
tshāndān lūstum dyan kyŏh rāth
vuchhum pànḍith panini garē
suy mye rŏṭum nĕchhàtúr tú sāth

–I, Lalla, set out with burning longing
And seeking, searching, passed the day and night
Till lo! I saw to mine own house belonging
The Pandit, and siezed my luck and star of light
(Trs. Nila Cram Cook)

lal bŏ lūsús tshāndān tú gvārān
hal myĕ kŏrmas rasani shyatiy
vuchhun hyŏtmas ṭàdry dīṭhmas baran
myĕ ti kal ganēyi tú zōgmas tàtiy

–I, Lalla wearied myself searching and seeking
Exhausting my strength my every nerve as I looked for Him,
I found His doors slammed and bolted
My longing became all the more intense
And I stood there watching for Him.

āyas vatē gàyas nú vatē
sĕmanzú svathē lūstum dŏh
chandas wuchhum hār na atē
nāvi tāras dimú kyāh bŏ

–I came by the highway, but by the highway I did not return
I found myself stranded halfway on the embankment
With the light of the day having faded away
Searching my pockets, a penny I did not find
What shall I pay now for being ferried across?

mal wŏndi zōlum
jigar mōrum
tyĕli lal nāv drām
yĕli dàly traàvymas tàtiy
–I burned the impurities of the mind
And killed my desires
Then only I did my name Lalla became known
When I surrendered completely before Him

pānas laàgith rūduk myĕ tsú
myĕ tsyĕ tshāndān lūstum dōh
pānas manz yĕli dyūthukh myĕ tsú
myĕ tsĕ tú pānas dyutLim tshōh
–In seeking 'me' and Thee' I passed the day
Absorbed within Thyself thou hadst remained
Concealed from me! I wondered for away
When I beheld Thee in myself, I gained
For Thee and me that rapure unrestrained
(Trs. Nila Cram Cook)

pŏt zūni wàthith mŏt bōlanōvum
dag lalúnaàvum dayi súnzi prayē
lalú lalú kàrith lālú vuzúnōvum
mīlith tas man shrōtsyōm dehē
–Waking up at the end of moonlit night
I called the 'mad one'–my mind
And soothed his pain with the love of God
Crying "It is I Lalla, it is I Lalla", I awakened the Beloved
And by becoming one with Him my mind and body became pure!

The first step in this "mystical progression" is, according to Silvia Silburn, self-annihilation or destruction of all doubt and dualism, and the culmination is communion with the divine, which in Shaiva triadic terminology is self-realization of one's Shiva-nature, a stage in which nothing remains but Shiva-consciousness—"*soruy suy ta boh no kenh*" (He is everything, and I am nothing). The ultimate mystical self-realization in Lal Ded, therefore, means absorption in Shiva.

But Lal Ded does not remain hovering in the high heaven of mystic experience alone. She has her feet firmly planted on the earth. There is no tendency in her to separate the experiences of mystical life from the experiences of ordinary life. Instead of disregarding everyday experiences she elevated herself through it to the ultimate experience of liberation, which in Trika metaphysics means *swatantrya* or absolute freedom of will, which is the nature of Supreme Shiva Himself. Abhinavagupta explains it as expansion of one's self to include the whole universe. Kashmir Shaivism, it should be noted, does not reject the phenomenal world as unreal or illusory but regards it to be the self-expression of Shiva–His poem, His work of art, His projection of Himself on a screen which is also Shiva. Lal Ded's expression of her longing to attain oneness with transcendence, therefore, should be taken to mean expression of her feeling of unity with Shiva's immanent form also. If "Shiva is all", then to her, He is not different from the ordinary man we find on the streets–he who laughs and sneezes and coughs and yawns:

asē pvandē zvasē zāmē
nyathúy snān kari tīrthan
vàhri vàhras nŏnuy āsē
nishi chhuy tú parzāntan

Yes, He it is who laughs and coughs and yawns
He, the ascetic naked all the year
Who bathes in sacred pools in all the dawns
But recognise how He to you is near
[Trs. Nila Cram Cook]

For Lal Ded, there is no difference between the 'I' and the 'other' ("*par ta pan*"), immanence and transcendence, universal and individual consciousness–subjective and objective reality being but aspects of the ultimate reality which is one and indivisible. She sees life as an eternal and continuous flow of consciousness:

àsī aàsy tú aàsī āsav
asī dōr kàr patúvath
shivas sōri nú zyŏn tú marun
ravas sōri nú atúgath

–We have been in the past
In future also we shall be
Forever the sun rises and sets
Forever Shiva creates and dissolves and creates again.

It is not that she is talking in riddles or in paradoxes about cycle of births and re-births and immortality of the soul. She is talking of human life which is a stream that flows onwards and onwards. It is this experience of reality that is at the core of her mysticism, which begins as the quest for the ultimate and culminates in a vision that is profoundly humanistic. And this is what marks her as a great poet. Lal Ded is not a professional philosopher, nor her verses any philosophical treatise, but she is deeply concerned with the predicament and ultimate destiny of humankind.

Yet Lal Ded's poetry is not the poetry of social concern in the sense it is made out to be by some scholars. In their

eagerness to construct her image as some sort of a social reformer out to reform the medieval Kashmiri society and rid it of the evils afflicting it. This is again a false image, a deliberate twist given to her spiritual humanism to suit ideological considerations. There is no use digging for communitarian ideals from her verses, for they are just not there, though she does feel disturbed by social injustice and discrimination of which she herself is a victim, and is outraged by the sham and pretence that go in the name of religion. She also displays a deep sensitivity towards human suffering, her heart bleeding at the sight of the learned man dying of starvation while an utter fool beats his cook (for not having cooked a tasty dish) :

gāṭulāh akh vuchhun bŏchhi suúty marān
pan zan harān puhúni vāvú lāh
nyash bŏd akh vuchhum vāzas mārān
tanú lal bŏ prārān tshĕnyam nā prāh

I saw a learned man dying of hunger
Trembling like dried leaves falling in harsh winter wind
An utter fool I saw beating his cook
(For not having prepared a delicious dish)
Since then I am waiting for being free of worldly attachments.

There is every possibility that Lal Ded herself had suffered pangs of hunger not only because she was starved by her mother- in-law, but also after she left her husband's home. This is what this verse seems to suggest:

tsal tsĕtta vŏndas bhay mō bhar
chaàny tsyanth karān pānú anād
tsĕ kō zanúni kshod harī kar
kīval tasunduy tōruk nād

–O, restless mind! Do not fear
The one who is Beginningless takes care of you
You do not know when he will satiate your hunger
Cry to Him alone for help !

In another verse she says :

treshi, bwachhi ma kreshanavun
yany tshei tany sandarun dih

Do not torment your body with the pangs of thirst and hunger
Whenever it feels exhausted, take care of it.

It should be obvious, therefore, that Lal Ded is not unaware of the harsh realities of life like hunger and poverty, nor ignorant of the agony and anguish of existence. Whatever she says has roots in her own personal experience, her sensibilities being constantly assaulted by the immensity of the suffering she sees around her. But her solution for human suffering and distress lies in the benevolent grace of Shiva which descends on man when he completely surrenders himself before his will. The intensity of her social awareness turns her almost into a rebel, even as her egalitarian ideas and ideals find expression in spiritual terms. Shiva, she says in one of her verses, shines like the sun on the high and the low alike :

rav matú thali thali taàpitan
taàpitan uttam-uttam dīsh
varun matú lōṭú garú àtsytyan
shiv chhuy krūṭh tú tsēn vopadīsh

Does the sun not shine everywhere alike
Or does it shine only on the best places?
Does not the water god "Varuna" enter every home?
Or does it enter only the homes of the fortunate?

While the way she asks such disturbing questions does reveal how intricately and intimately her spirituality is linked with her universal humanistic concerns, it would be too much to assume that she was actually a social activist. Yet there are people who like to persist with the theory that Lal Ded "synthesized the best" in Shaivite and Islamic traditions, whatever that may mean. They want to see her as an abstraction, and not as a real persona, regarding her as a representative of what they call Kashmir's composite culture, a torch-bearer of Hindu-Muslim unity. With obvious political motivations, they project her as though she were a spokesperson of the present day secular discourse and utilize her for scoring points in current political debates, not caring to think how cliched their arguments based on false premises have now become. Through their oversimplifications and vague generalizations, they have turned Lal Ded virtually into a one-verse poet, stripping her of her real glories, *"Shiv chhuy thali-thali rozan, mav zan hyond to musalman"* (Shiva abides in everything, so do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Musalman). Is that then the quintessence of her poetic thought? The only basis of her greatness? The verse appears to be a spurious one, although Rajanaka Bhaskara has included it in his collection of "Lalavakyani". Lal Ded had spent her early youth in the reign of Udyan Deva, the last Hindu king of Kashmir, and of queen Kota Rani. Even when Islamic rule was finally established in 1359 A.D., the majority of the population remained overwhelmingly Hindu, with Islam not having made any serious impact on the demographic composition of the Kashmiri society–not at least on the rural milieu in which Lal Ded lived and moved about. To whom then has the verse been addressed? Who was discriminating against whom? The fact is that attempts to show Lal Ded's verses as a part of the current secular debate, are being made only as a strategy to condone the barbarities inflicted on

Kashmiri Hindus during the six hundred years of Islamic rule. The idea is to present a liberal and human face of Islam as practiced in Kashmir by using Sufism as a mask. Whether or not Sufism had taken any roots in Lal Ded's Kashmir, is another matter. The strategy seems to have worked, for a general impression has been created that she was either a Sufi mystic herself or was deeply influenced by Sufism.

Whether or not Lal Ded had a social reformer's zeal, she was strongly egalitarian in her views and was more aware than most devotional poets about the prevailing social conditions of her times. And, contrary to the generally held belief that she was unaware of what was happening around her, a view to which even Prof Kaul subscribes, there is enough evidence in Lalla's *vaaks* to show that she was very much conscious of what was going on around her, including the sweeping political changes that were taking place during her time. This is at least what the following lines of hers appear to suggest :

hyath kàrith rājya phēri nā
dith kàrith tripti nā man

In ruling kingdoms there is no relief
In giving them away there yet is grief
(Trs. Nila Cram Cook)

Is she not is referring here to the Kota Rani-Rinchin-Shah Mir affair that eventually brought in Muslim rule to Kashmir?

Lal Ded is scathing in her attack on hollow ceremony and ritual in religion, her emphasis being on inner experience. She has no belief in "sacred places and sacred times", pilgrimages and fasts supposed to bring religious merit. She scoffs at what A.K. Ramanujam calls "orthodox ritual genuflections" and recitations. She expresses her strong

abhorrence for animal sacrifice and detests idol worship. She must have surely provoked the orthodoxy at whom she misses no chance to take pot-shots. In this she reminds one of the Kannada Vachana poet Basvanna, and also of Kabir and Nanak whom she anticipated. Surely, hers was a strong voice of protest in medieval Kashmir–perhaps the only voice raised so fearlessly.

With Lal Ded not conforming to any of the image constructs built around her by those who want to reduce her to an idea or an abstraction according to their predilections, what could the real Lal Ded have been like? To reclaim her authentic persona, we have no option but to discard the motivated myths and invoke the actual text of her verses. In this context, it must be noted that Lal Ded recited her *vaaks* to actual audiences who were enraptured and mesmerized by her words, which happened to be in their own mother tongue. In verse after verse we find her addressing the ubiquitous Bhatta, whether to admonish him (*pūz kas karakh hūṭü baṭā*– 'Who will you worship, O ritual-ridden Pandit?'), or to explaining a subtle point or two (*yōhōy vopdīsh chhuy baṭā*–'This is what the doctrine teaches, O Pandit !'). This clearly shows that she knows her audience. Not that Lal Ded belongs to any one community–her message is certainly universal–but she does have the Pandit in mind whenever she has a point to make.

To find out the authentic Lal Ded, then, we have to rely mainly on the internal evidence that her *vaaks* furnish. Packed with sufficient biographical material, as the *vaaks* are, we can reconstruct with their help her mystic life, her experience as a woman, as a saint and as a poet, her view of the relationship between God, man and the world. An image as near reality as possible. But in this there are problems. Lalla vaaks have been orally transmitted from generation to generation and

are available only in randomly available versions, with practically no chronological sequence. An attempt to discern a sequence of thought in them has been made by Prof. B.N. Parimoo, who has tried to link them as thematic units under some broad divisions in his book, "The Ascent of Self". The book, written in 1978, is the first exercise of its kind undertaken by anyone and can be deservingly called a significant contribution to Lal Ded studies. "The cue to the arrangement of the verses", says the author, "is taken from the 'I-ness' categorically denoting personal experience".

But admirable as Prof. Parimoo's attempt to "re-interpret" the vaakhs is, one cannot be certain that while picking up the autobiographical threads he has arranged them according to actual chronological sequence, that is, exactly in the order they were composed. Prof. Parimoo himself is not sure, and in fact nobody can be, for there cannot be any ideal selection of verses transcribed randomly from oral tradition. The author of the book, however, does not appear to have taken as much care as he should have in making his selection. Quite a number of verses he has included are obvious interpolations. The lines "*hŏnḍ maȧrytan kinú kaṭh*", for instance, which he has included as the very first *vaakh*, is not actually a *vaakh* at all, but a saying attributed to Lal Ded. His total reliance on the account of Ramjoo Malla for biographical information because it does not "tilt the purpose of this book" appears to be rather curious.

Before referring to the text, therefore, we have to be sure how far genuine it is. This accentuates the need of a critically valid text of Lalla *Vaaks*–something that has not been attempted quite seriously so far, except a solitary attempt made by Prof. Jaya Lal Kaul. Laments Prof. Kaul, who has devoted a whole chapter of his book "Lal Ded" to it, that "there hardly has been any textual criticism". He then proceeds

to sift what he calls "unwarranted variants and spurious interpolations" as far as possible from verses that can be regarded as genuinely authentic. Of the total 258 *vaaks* that circulate in the name of Lal Ded and occur in various collections, he has included only 138 in his collection and even their authenticity he is not prepared to "vouch for". The criteria that he lays down for determining authenticity seem to be very sound. These according to him should be : "The evidence of diction and prosody, and the quality and cast of thought, the way it is organized in the .process of expression, in a word, the characteristic style of Lal Ded". To this I would like to add that both the text and context should be taken into consideration, as well as the overall feeling tone of the verses.

Prof. Kaul has pointed out : "There are 35 verses that occur both in ... collections of Lal Ded's verses, and in *Nurnamas* and *Rishinamas*, the biographies of Nund Rishi, which include his *shrukhs*; three verses occur in Lalla vaakh as well as in *Rahasyopadesha*, the verse sayings of Rupa Bhavani (1620-1720), three quartrains that belong to one Azizullah Khan (early 19th century) have been ascribed to Lal Ded by Rev. J. Hinton Knowles in his Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs". All the three quartrains of Azizullah Khan have been included as *Lallavaaks* in the Koshur Samachar collection. Interestingly, one of these quartrains has been translated by that great Indian translator A.K. Ramanujan in the name of Lal Ded, and quoted as such by K. Sachchidanandan, Secretary, Sahitya Akademi, in of his papers on women poets of India. The verse, as given in the Lal Ded Number of Koshur Samachar is as follows :-

daman basti ditō dam
thitay yithú daman khār
shàstras swan gatshi haàsil
wuni chhay sul tú tshāndun yār

Obviously, neither the diction (she could never have used words like '*yaar*' or '*haásil*') nor the quality and cast of thought of this verse is that of Lal Ded, but it continues to be ascribed to her again and again. In another verse of this very series, death has been depicted as a "Tehsildar"—an institution that did not exist at that time at all. The confusion prevailing in this regard is mainly due to interpolations, a game indulged in by many, not without a strong element of deliberateness. Lines from other poets heavily laden with Persian and Arabic words have been passed on as Lal Ded's as in an attempt at what can be called linguistic subversion. Some of her ardent and overzealous admirers too have tried to put words in her mouth, though out of reverence for her. The total incompatibility of diction seems to have never bothered the perpetrators of such distortions. Yet nobody can claim that the language in which *Lallavaakhs* have been passed on to the unsuspecting inheritors of her oral legacy is the language in which they must have originally fallen from the celebrated poetess' mouth. The only sure way to ascertain their authenticity would be a linguistic comparison with extant Kashmiri works of periods immediately preceding or succeeding Lal Ded, as written evidence of no contemporary work is available. These works are the '*Chhumma Sampradaya*' verses which can be assigned to the 11th or 12th century, '*Mahanaya Prakasha*' by Shiti Kantha, '*Banasur Katha*' by Avtar Bhatta and '*Sukha-dukha Charit*' by Ganak Prashast. I had the good fortune of studying all these works while preparing my doctoral thesis on the linguistic peculiarities of '*Banasura Katha*', and so I am aware of their significance in presenting a somewhat coherent picture of the medieval development of the Kashmiri language and their immense value in tracing earlier forms of a good number of Kashmiri words. These works provide ample evidence of the fact that Kashmiri has developed from the MIA stages of Prakrit and

Apabhramsha in the same way as other Indo-Aryan languages have. Anyone who cares to go through these works will be able to gain valuable knowledge of the linguistic situation that actually prevailed in Kashmir from the 11th-12th century to the end of the 15th. If would be useful to give here one example each from the above mentioned works to give a feel of the state of Kashmiri language used during this period:-

bhāva svabhāvē saba avināshi
sapana sabhāva vi uppanna
tē az niravidihi agam prakāshi
idassa dishti kāchi vipachhanna

(Chumma Sampradaya)

yasu-yasu jantus samvid yas-yas
nīla-pīta sukha-dukha-swarūp
udayis datta samānyi samaras
kama kampana tas-tas anurūp

(Mahanaya Prakasha)

dhik-dhik myaànis yādava zammas
vanati atsā majja kachān
yudha karā namēt swakammas
ushē atha chhŏn iha thān

(Banasura Katha)

him zan tāpē viglyōs pāpē
kukaram chittō

(Sukha-dukha Charit)

A detailed description of the linguistic features of these works is not possible here; but one can clearly notice the thread of linguistic development that runs through them. Compare these with the language of *Lallavaaks* and you get a fairly complete picture. Grierson has called the language of Lal Ded's *vaaks* "Old Kashmiri", but it does not require

any special insight to see that it is quite "modern" compared to the language of the illustrations cited above because of the many changes it has undergone due to oral transmission. However, we can come as near to an authorized version as possible by reconstructing their text with the help of *Banasur Katha* and *Sukh-dukha Charit*. This is a desirable but extremely difficult task.

Even so, those who take the deliberately distorted and mutilated text to be genuine, ignoring the fact of its massive interpolation, must know that Lal Ded could in no case have used the heavily Persianised language of the 19th or early 20th century nearly six hundred years back. It is of utmost importance therefore, that to arrive at authentic Lal Ded, we should discard all the spurious elements introduced by those who are interested in building false image constructs.

Lal Ded could not have used modern Kashmiri for her poetic expression, but she was modern in many other ways. She had in her the characteristic modern self-reflectiveness, the insistence on accepting as authentic only what she herself could experience directly, the broad catholicity of outlook that called for tolerance of diverse views and made her define her relationship to God in terms of oneness of all existence, the deep existential anguish she felt while reflecting on the human condition. She was modern in the universality of her concerns, in her choice of metaphor and image, in her rejection of every kind of sham and pretence, in her fearless assertion of what she saw as truth. Indeed, at times it appears that she is more modern then most of the contemporary Kashmiri poets.

Lal Ded's struggle as a woman has been largely overlooked. She may not have been a conscious feminist in the sense the term is understood today, but she did show the courage of resisting the oppressive structures of patriarchy

and refusing to play the traditional role of a submissive daughter-in-law. Rebelling against social tyranny, she broke the shackles that bind a woman even before her birth, and asserted her right of taking her own decisions. She challenged the orthodoxy and threw the rigid codes of dress and decorum followed by the medieval society of her times to the winds and roamed about with barely any clothes on like the great Kannada Shaivite poetess, Mahadeviakka. Perhaps it was her last act of defiance against a social set-up whose arbitrary and gender discriminatory rules she did not find acceptable.

It is in accordance with these facts that we shall have to reconstruct the image of the great saint-poetess of Kashmir, noting that she does not fit into most of the image-constructs that have been built around her. The Shah Hamadan anecdote and the so-called miracle of the oven seem to be an insult to such a fearlessly and fiercely independent woman. She started her spiritual journey as a tormented soul, but attained a stage where self- realization and self-awareness gave her tremendous inner strength and the confidence that derived from that strength :

kĕsari vanŭ vōlum ràţith shāl
–I dragged the lion from its den like a jackal.

It is this that explains the pervasive influence that Lal Ded has on Kashmiri psyche to this day. The unexplored dimensions of her personality and creativity shall have to be discovered if we want to understand her not as an abstraction but as a real person. She is quintessentially Kashmiri, having shaped the Kashmiri language and literature, as she did, but she is also universal in her appeal. Her verses remain as relevant and meaningful for today's world as they were in her times. Let me conclude by quoting a line from one of her own most powerful *vaaks*:

yim pad lali vàny tim hridi ānk
–Brand on your heart what Lalla spoke in verse!

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Chapter 5

LAL DED—THE POET WHO GAVE A VOICE TO WOMEN

Prof. Neerja Mattoo

In the fourteenth century, a woman writing in any language was a rarity, but it happened in Kashmir. A voice, which set off a resonance heard with clear tone till today, spoke directly to the people and what is more, was heard with all seriousness, recorded in collective memory and later, the words put down on paper. This path-breaking woman is the mystic poet Lal Ded, whom the Kashmiris venerate to this day as a prophetess, moral guide and a fount of practical wisdom. Her word is quoted at every step in their lives. In fact the very language owes most of its richness of phrase and metaphor to her contribution to it. Apart from its spiritual message, her work, like Shakespeare's, has a timeless meaning accessible to people of different intellectual levels. Unlike most women who have left an imprint on history, she was not related to an important person in the social or spiritual hierarchy of the time. Nor was she located in a convent, or as some mediaeval Christian women mystics like, say, Saint Maria Maddalena de Pazzi, (Florence, 1566-1607) or the Beguines were in a community of women, where a band of

devoted followers would note down every word as it fell from her lips. It was the import, sonority and direct appeal of her utterances that reached out to the peasant and the priest, the prince and the plebeian and stayed printed on their minds and travelled down the ages by word of mouth. This is the woman known simply as Lal Ded, the mother figure to the common men and women of Kashmir.

Lal Ded was born in the second decade of the fourteenth century–the exact year of her birth is not known–in a Kashmiri Pandit (Brahmin) family in Pandrethan, a village in the suburbs of Srinagar. Her early life was no different from that of any other girl of that time in her station. Before being married off at an early age (as was the custom in her community), into a family at nearby Pampore, she seems to have been given some education in religious texts by the family priest, who has been identified as a learned scholar and yogic practitioner Siddha Srikanth. He is the Guru to whom she refers in her *vaakhs* frequently, sometimes asking him questions, sometimes even playfully pointing out his inadequacies as a spiritual mentor.

The marriage, as is the case with most where the woman dares to steer an independent course, was doomed from the very beginning. The couple was ill-matched. The husband had none of the sensitivity or subtlety of mind to appreciate Lal Ded's deeper expectations from life. Besides, the mother-in-law was typical, oppressive, hostile presence, unable to understand that even though performing all the duties of a traditional daughter- in-law, Lal Ded's concerns lay beyond those a mere householder lived and that she thought at a higher plane. She would miss no opportunity to find something to complain about in her behaviour. Lal Ded was thus a double victim–of an inimical mother-in-law and a jealous husband. There are innumerable stories of how cruelly she

was tormented and the Kashmiri language is full of proverbs connected with Lal Ded's legendary patience, wisdom, deep insights and spiritual power. The best known story of her life concerns the patience with which she put up with her mother-in-law's treatment, who did not even give her enough to eat.

But far from this treatment turning her into an object of pity, Lal Ded became, what is known in modem feminist critical idiom, a Subject Woman, or–to use the current jargon, an Empowered Woman, one who through her mystic poetry, set in motion a cultural, linguistic, social and religious revolution. Her work reveals that she conversed and discussed with the most learned scholars–all men–of her time on an equal footing, without a trace of gender inequality, self-consciousness or the so-called womanly reserve, yet her vocabulary is that of the common man. There is no elitist, Brahminical choice of word, phrase or metaphor–these are drawn from a woman's world of domesticity, even though she walked out of marriage and home. Her poetry is a woman's work and in the process she gives a voice to women. As an example, here is a popular *vaakh*:-

āmi panú sŏdras nāvi chhas larnān
kati bāzi day myon me ti diyi tar
āmyan tākyan pŏny zan shramān
zuv chhum bramān garú gatshúhā

(With thread untwisted my boat I tow through the sea,
Would the Lord heed and ferry me across?
Water seeps through my bowls of unbaked clay,
Oh how my heart longs to go back home!)

Let us analyse this vaakh textually first, without going into the mystic symbolism of the "Eternal Sea". Lal Ded's choice of metaphor is drawn from the lowly boatman and the potter and the emotional climax of the *vaakh*, the cry of

an unhappy woman caught in a bad marriage who longs to return home. Of course she uses these to convey her mystic quest, but it is interesting to note that even when talking about abstract concepts, it is the woman's voice that rings out true.

In several *vaakhs* she even defies the patriarchic authority of the Guru, a figure normally highly esteemed by all mystics. The Sufis cannot take a step in the spiritual journey unless the Peer holds their hand. And so it is with the Trikaites. But Lal Ded is an exception in this. Of course she had a teacher, why, several mystics from whom she learnt, and with whom she had discussions to resolve problems in the spiritual path she had chosen to follow. But the abject surrender of the Sufi is not for her. She would "meet him equally on this", without false modesty or coy humility and is, therefore, quite unselfconscious in expressing her dissatisfaction if the Guru is unable to give an answer that appeals to her mind. The mind is important too, in her scheme of things, in spite of her belief in God's grace descending upon some privileged beings, enabling them to comprehend intuitively. The following two *vaakhs* are interesting in this context. In one she poses a query to the Guru and in the other proceeds to supply the answer herself :-

hē gwarā parmēshwarā
bāvtam tsēyi chhuy antar vyŏd
doshvay wopdān kandúpurā
hūkavú turun tú hā kavú tŏtuy.

(Oh my Guru, for me you are the Lord,
You who know the inner self, tell me do,
When both rise from the centre of the body
Why is the breath 'phū' cold and 'hā' so hot?)

It is a child-like question, curiosity about something that apparently does not make sense: why should the same breath have contradictory effects when blown out sharply with pursed lips and when exhaled forcefully with mouth open? One cools the palm while the other warms it. The Sufi would patiently wait for an answer from the Peer, but Lal Ded does not hesitate to venture an explanation for the peculiar phenomena, herself :-

nābhisthanās chhĕ prakarath zaiavúnī
brahmasthanas shishurun mwŏkh
brahmānḍas pĕth nad vuhuvúnī
'phū' tavay turun 'hā' gav tŏt.

(The nature of the navel region is fiery like the sun,
The crown of the head icy like the moon
From which cool waters down the tubes flow
That is why 'phū' is cold and 'hā' so hot.)

The second verse is a succinct explanation of the system of yoga practised by Lal Ded. It believes that in the region of the navel is seated the 'bulb', i.e., the root of the 'nadis' (tubes) through which '*prana*' (life air) circulates. Hence Lal Ded calls it 'kandapura' (the region of the bulb). It is interesting to note that it is the area that is known in human anatomy as the solar plexus. It is so named because the radial network of nerves and ganglia situated behind the stomach and supplying the organs here resemble the rays of the sun. For Lal Ded too this region is hot. But with practice, a yogi can rouse the coiled energy lying at the base of the spine and lead up through various levels in the spinal cord to the cool 'thousand petalled lotus' situated at the crown of the head. This is the blissful state of cosmic consciousness, where all hot agitations of mind and body are stilled. No wonder then, that breath should take upon itself the cooling and warming properties of the body, which after all, is sustained by it!

The fearless confidence of self-reliance such verses exude makes Lal Ded stand out not only among mystic poets, but among women and all other enslaved beings. To admit of human shortcomings in a Guru is rare, and then go on to say that ones own resources have helped finally is rarer still. Lal Ded appears as an individual voice unfettered by norms, ritual obeisance or conventions. In this respect she is a precursor to the later, better known Mirabai. It is also a pointer to the fact that Lal Ded had effortlessly transcended gender and struck a blow at the prevalent patriarchy even as early as the fourteenth century. The so-called liberated woman of the twentieth century appears much smaller in comparison. The total absence of the gender factor or any feeling of regret at being barred from seeking or following her own wishes because of her femininity or without the intervention of patriarchy, is a striking feature of her art. Hers is no weak, helpless voice appealing for succour or aid from a mere man. In fact, it is the powerful voice giving expression to the wishes of all those men and women who wish to find a way out of the labyrinth of the human situation in life. Perhaps to a real mystic like Lal Ded, the body which is responsible for male and female duality, is important not to emphasize the differentness between genders, but as a vehicle to carry the spirit in which there is no difference.

A striking feature of Lal Ded's *vaakhs* is the unsqueamish use of images of violence, but even here the metaphors are from everyday life. The porter, weaver, carpenter, blacksmith and other unprivileged classes, who form the backbone of village and town economies, find their work and trade celebrated in her *vaakhs*, even while they tackle abstruse Shaivite practices. She seems to have noticed the material world around her with a sharp, poet's eye, and used it as her vocabulary of choice, unfettered by the conventions of serious, philosophical discourse set down by male authority.

damadām kŏrmas damanhāle
prazalyōrn dīph tú nanēyam zāth.
andryúm prakāsh nĕbar thsŏṭum
gaṭi manzú rŏtum tú kàrmas thaph.

(The bellows pipe I pressed gently, muffling its breath,
The lamp lit, in its radiance I stood revealed.
I let inner light burst out in the open,
Through the darkness caught hold of Him and would not let go.)

Lal Ded's metaphors are not obscure, they come from ordinary life. Here she uses one from the blacksmith's forge to explain a subtle concept of Trikashastra. She is talking about the intensely disciplined practice of breath control as part of *samadhi* (yogic meditation). The *yogi* is like a blacksmith pressing a bellows pipe in order to control his forge, or a flautist (Lal Ded would not mix metaphors, but to explain the richness of her thought here, one is forced to mix one from the smithy and another from the music room!). As a flautist plays upon the holes of his flute, modulating the notes and creating melodies and harmonies, the *yogi* seems to play upon the process of inhalation and exhalation in the same way to create a world of awareness within her. The light of true knowledge is made to shine in her consciousness, in the way a flame blazes into life as the bellows, which breathe life into it, are pressed. It is this Inner Light that illuminates the self and once seen, the knowledge of the divine that the unforgettable experience brings with it is never lost. The poet uses the device of ellipsis as if to try and withhold something even while letting the secret, Inner Light shine upon the uninitiated. In fact this is an example of the tension that exists in all mystic poetry, between the desire to tell of the secrets apprehended and the need to keep them from the 'non-people', the large mass that is not fine-tuned to receive,

comprehend or appreciate the subtle experiences with any degree of sensitivity. But in Lal Ded's case the urge to reveal wins over. The tension, however, gives the verse a dramatic quality, making the words into poetry. Of course, it can become obscure due to ellipsis and the tightly packed thought-the very subject and nature of the esoteric must make it so—but for the reader the thrill and intellectual excitement of unraveling a metaphysical teaser is reward enough.

nābadi bāras aṭaganḍ ḍyŏl gōrn
dih kān hŏl gōm ḥĕka kàhō
gwar sund vatsun rāvan tyŏlpyōm
pàhali rŏs khyŏl gōm hĕkà kàhō

(The candy load on my back is loosened,
The body bent like a bow, how do I bear it?
The Guru's word hurts like a weeping blister,
A flock without a shepherd am I, how do I bear it?

The lightness of touch in the first *vaakh* is in sharp contrast with the second verse, where the subject is dealt with in much greater poetic 'weight'. At first she would just weep at the thought of attachment to the material world, which she knows, must not next *vaakh* the complexity of the problem of attachment- detachment is brought into sharper focus. The dearly beloved worldly possessions are a load, yet it is not easy to let go of them, one's attachment makes it a sweet load, even though the back may be bent under its weight. Therefore the Guru's word to let the weight fall off, galls like a suppurating blister, strong as the yearning for bodily pleasures remains, even though with advancing age and decaying powers, enjoyment of luxuries may no longer be possible, suggested by the image of the bent body. The agony such a predicament brings with it has been described in a sharply jolting metaphor of a blistering wound. The sense of bewilderment and loss is beautifully summed up in the picture of a shepherdless

flock. The need for the healing touch as well as guidance of a shepherd in these circumstances is quite understandable. Apart from its aptness as a metaphor, the image of a shepherd and the flock of sheep is also a reminder of Christian religious poetry, which is often dressed in similar pastoral imagery. Instances of such cross-cultural phrases and figures of speech come up with pleasant regularity in a study of literatures from different languages pointing to the universality of the images used. While her images coincide with those used by mystic poets in the west on the one hand, they also occur in the poems of the Hindi Bhakti poets., Surdas and Kabir, on the other. The following *vaakh* of Lal Ded's, which is a fine summing up of the complex Trika doctrine of *spanda*, the divine vibrations that are playfully creating and recreating the world constantly, also reminds us of Surdas' choice of words when describing the preparations Radha made to cleanse and deck herself in 'new' clothes before she presented herself to Krishna, her beloved Lord, in the verse which begins as, "*Naiyo neh naiyo...*" (My body new, new my clothes, the whole world is renewed with me!)

> *tsĕ̈th nŏ̈vuy tsàndram nŏ̈vuy*
> *zalmay dyūhum navam nŏ̈vuy*
> *yanú pĕṭha lali mĕ tanúman nŏ̈vuy*
> *tanú lal bŏ navam nàvuy chhas.*

> (My mind cleansed and new, the moon is new too,
> Everything in this ocean of the world I saw as new,
> Since I, Lal, washed my body and self,
> Forever renewed am I!)

This feeling of perpetual renewal that is felt by a true Trika aspirant when an insight is gained into the reality of things, is not applied to a change in her thinking alone, but to everything, including the material world, which as a result of cosmic vibrations (*spanda*), is in a state of flux, constantly

recreating itself. Our corporeal body is very much a part of this world, so its basic tools of understanding, our physical senses, also experience a renewal. Going beyond them, the faculties of understanding also undergo the process of renewal. Therefore, comprehension, rather apprehension, is now a new, fresh experience, because things are bathed in the light of the awakened senses and faculties. Readers of English literature will be struck by a similar thought expressed in his well-known poem, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality", by Wordsworth, where he describes his experience after falling into a mystic trance. He has a vision and sees the whole world of nature "bathed in a celestial light", looking fresh, different. It seems that to him too what he was seeing now, in the 'new light', appeared to be 'new'.

It is believed that Lal Ded, after she left home in a final break with material ties, went about unclothed. This suggests that the life of the spirit rather than that of the flesh became real for her. It is not out of a desire to shock, nor in a mood for self-mortification, nor even as self-flagellation in the manner of the mediaeval women Christian saints, that she exposed herself to the elements. It is just that in her 'fine madness', she seems to have become completely unself-conscious, almost unaware of her body. She was thus happily, effortlessly able also to transcend the gender factor that occupies so much of the mental space of women intellectuals, thinkers and writers today. She refused to be bothered by what the world would say when she went about naked. When she was asked whether she felt no shame at showing her body to all the men around her, she asked whether there was a man around! To her the ordinary mass of people was no better than sheep or other dumb animals. This story is similar to that of Mirabai, whom Tulsidas is supposed to have refused to meet because he only met men and not women,

to which she is said to have retorted in the same way, asking who, apart from the Lord, was a real man?

The two following *vaakhs* are illustrative :-

gwaran vŏnúnam kunuy vatsun,
nĕbra dŏpnam andar atsun
suy mĕ lali gav vākh tú vatsun
tavay hĕtum nangay natsun

(The Guru gave me but one word of wisdom—
From the outside bade me turn within
That word for me, Lal, is the surest prophecy,
And that is why I dance in naked abandon!)

lyakh tú thwakh pĕthú shēri hĕtsúm
nyandā sapnyam path brōnthú tāny
lal chhas kal zānh nú thsĕnim
adú yĕli sapnis vyĕpē kyāh?

(Abuse and spit I wore like a crown,
Slander followed or preceded my steps;
But Lal I am, never swerved from my goal—
My being suffused with God, where is the room for these?)

The confidence that these words exude is no hollow self-satisfaction, but real faith in her own worthiness as an instrument of the Supreme Being. In the first *vaakh*, Lal is condensing in a few telling phrases, an important tenet of her philosophy of life: the need to go beyond the apparent to the underlying truth of Reality. One's gaze, she seems to say, must transcend the exterior, which alone is revealed by the physical senses, and go even beyond what our mental faculties reveal, in order to find and see the Spirit in its real truth, in its 'nakedness'. Here Lal Ded should find herself suffused with His presence and thus unruffled by public opinion.

lōlūki wokhúlú vaàlinj pishim,
kwàkal tsàjim tú rúzús rasú,
būzúm tú zaàjim pānas tsàshim,
kavú zānú tavú suúti marú kinú lasú.

(In love's mortar I pounded and ground my heart—
Evil passions fled and I was at peace—
Roasted and burnt and consumed it myself,
Yet know not whether I die or live!)

Pounding or roasting or eating up of the heart, it is all done through love, as in the way of the Sufi. It should not be mistaken for the self-flagellation of the mediaeval Christian monks or nuns, nor of the prescription of a bed of nails for the Hindu ascetic, but the similarity of idiom in all these different schools of mysticism demands our attention. Here we are also reminded of the ceremony of the Eucharist, which is such an important focus of women Christian mystics' thought and practice through the Middle Ages. One reads of the ecstasy of some Christian women saints, in which they actually felt as if they were eating the flesh of Christ and drinking His blood in a perfect state of union with Him. In this state, sometimes, the wounds Christ suffered on the Cross, appeared as stigmata upon their own bodies in a miraculous way. They would describe all this in elaborate detail and their companions in the abbeys and convents have faithfully recorded it. Thus it is apparent that though it may assume different forms, the basic thread of mysticism seems to link so many beads and pendants from multitudinous locales and cultures to make a beautiful necklace. No discussion of Lal Ded's work can afford to overlook the importance of the stanza form she used. After all it was the cadenced, rhymed form of the verses that enabled her *vaakhs* to survive in collective memory even while 'official' history preferred to stay silent on her. Of course her use of the

language of the commoners, Kashmiri, in preference over the language of scholars, Sanskrit, was responsible for its popularity with the masses, but because these were verses and could easily be sung or chanted, they were easy to memorize and thus they could live through the ages. Let us now take a close look at mechanics of this verse form she used, the *vaakh*. When written down, it consists of four lines, each of which is a loose tetrametre. The first syllable is stressed and then the stress falls alternately, the last syllable being generally unstressed. In fact, after beginning with authority, the end of the line is like a fade out. But this does not jar, the soft touch at the end soothes the ear and makes the message go down even more easily to the uninitiated. The gravity of tone suits the seriousness of the message conveyed. Roph Bhawani used the same metre later in the seventeenth century, finding it most suitable for her mystic utterances. Besides, Roph Bhawani called Lal Ded her Guru, acknowledged her debt both in the content and form of her poetry, therefore her choice of this stanza form is quite appropriate. The gentle cadence of these solemn numbers is like a warm, comforting breath of air on a cold night. But at the same time, this medium" slow moving and thereby allowing the thought to develop and come to a resolution in the four lines of the stanza-is well able to convey, in a finely condensed way, the subtle, sometimes elusive thought processes involved in a mystic experience. And the great advantage of the rhythm of this form of verse is that it makes them easily recitable, which is one of the reasons for the survival of these works in an oral tradition through unlettered ages. Whether Lal Ded herself forged this metre or it was already in existence and her words naturally fell into its musical mode is difficult to know. But in Kashmiri, it was certainly she who first honed and fine-tuned it to serve as her voice.

The most significant contribution of Lal Ded is that she brought the difficult Shaiva philosophy out from the cubicles of the Sanskrit-knowing scholars into the wide, open spaces of the Kashmiri-knowing common people. In the process of translating its highly evolved, in fact highly subtle, concepts and her personal mystic experiences into the language of the masses, she not only made these accessible to them, but also enriched the Kashmiri language. The mystic's dilemma of how to communicate the uncommunicable personal vision, seems to have been effortlessly resolved by her through the use of common idioms, images and metaphors with which people could easily relate. Thus she is able to explain ideas and experiences which would otherwise lie beyond the reach of ordinary people. The medium of the mother tongue and the use of the easily recitable verse form of the *vaakh*, made her utterances pass into common parlance and secured for them a place in collective memory. What gives her words authority even though as a woman she might have lacked it in that society and time, is that she has a personal experience of reality, a direct relationship with Shiva, without the aid of an intermediary male figure. In this we can compare her to the mediaeval Christian women mystics once again. For them too the only way to validate their words, and to get out of the all-pervasive, constricting presence of male authority, was this claim of a personal relationship with God. After all, it was from God Himself that all the authority of the Church, all of whose top functionaries were male, was drawn. These women were thus able to establish some authority of their own. We can say that in this 'confession', they did not need a 'confessor', they could be alone.

CHAPTER 6

LANGUAGE OF LAL DED'S POETRY

DR. ROOP KRISHEN BHAT

Sir Richard Temple in his book "The Word of Lalla" says : "The *vaakhs* of Laleshwari have become part of day to day conversation in Kashmiri households. Her religion is not bookish. Her religion is a mix of people, hopes and miseries. Her *vaakhs* are of high standard, spiritual, brief, to the point, sweet, full of hope, lively and representative of the status of a common man". In their context, the *vaakhs* represent human brotherhood, harmony, goodness, service to mankind. The proverbial and idiomatic significance of *vaakhs* make these popular even after 600 years of their existence.

Sir Richard Grierson says in 'Lal Vaakyani' : "There would hardly be a language in the world which would match the popularity of sayings of saint-poets or poetesses to those of Lal Ded in Kashmiri."

Such is the power of the Lal Ded's poetry that even after 600 years of history, full of political, social and economic upheavals, its language has not undergone any major change. It is as intelligible today as it was originally when the *vaakhs* were composed. Let us now make an attempt to analyse the language used in Lal Ded's *vaakhs*.

The language of the *vaakhs* does not only indicate the diction of the poetess or the terminology in vogue at that time but a reflection and representation of the socio-cultural and political life of that period. The diction also reflects the shades of the personal life of the great saint-poetess.

It is an established fact that idiolects differ from person to person. However, there is resemblance and similarity at the dialectical level. That is the reason why no one could match the quality and the standard, either of the language or the content of Lal Ded's *vaakhs* though numerous attempts were made by various poets to imitate them. To understand the language of the *vaakhs*, one has to go back to the 14th century AD and to understand the socio-political background of those times. The language of 14th century Kashmir as used in the *vaakhs* is of Indo-Aryan sub-stock of languages spoken by the immigrants of that time who had crossed over to the Valley from the Northern range of mountains several thousand years earlier. Till the 14th century, or till Lal Ded's time, Kashmiris had borrowed and assimilated numerous words from Hindu, Shaiva and Buddhist religious vocabulary into their language, but had still retained the sentence-structure and sound system of proto-Kashmiri. Vocabulary keeps on changing but usually the sound- system and sentence-structure is not easily affected. The language of Lal *vaakhs* is an authentic example of proto-Kashmiri form of language. The language of the *vaakhs* is the language of the common people or colloquial and not the kind of classical language used by scholars. The common man's language does not absorb the rigidity or conservativeness of borrowed words but instead changes the form of such words to suit its system and usage. That is why a lot many words of Sanskrit which were borrowed into Kashmiri became part of the core-vocabulary of Kashmiri and are no more strange to us.

Some of the words which could be attributed to proto-Kashmiri and were part of Kashmiri even before the Sanskrit influence and used frequently in Lal Ded's *vaakhs* are :

nŏv	new	*nas*	nose	*añd*	end
lot	light	*pŏd*	footstep	*nañgú*	naked
àchh	eye	*dañd*	tooth	*ḑŏmb*	womb

These words are common in all Aryan languages. However, the words or vocables which are related to rituals or customs are usually from Pali or Sanskrit, because Shaivism and Buddhism remained the religions of Kashmiris for hundreds of years. Some examples:

i) *dēshi āyas dashi dēshi tsàlith*
tsàlith tsŏṭum shuni adú vāv
shivúy dyūmṭhum shāyi shāyi mīlith
shĕ tú trĕ trupurmas tú shivúy drāv

I roamed the ten directions and pierced the wind and the void. I closed the nine gates of the body and shut out the thirtysix, Wherever I looked I found the Lord.

ii) *shiv chhuy thali thali rōzān*
mō zān baṭú tú musalmān
truk hay chhukh tú pān praznāv
sway chhay sāhibas suúty zān

Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere. Then do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Musalman. If you are wise, know yourself, that is true knowledge of the Lord.

Lal Ded has nowhere used the word Hindu but *batu* since Hindu, the modified form of the word. "Sindhu", came into use much after Lal Ded's period. With an exception of Shitikanth's "Mahanayprakash" we do not have many written manuscripts or Kashmiri language of pre-Lal Ded period. Hence her *vaakhs* assume the distinction of being the first

extant sample of the Kashmiri language, and, to use Prof. Jaya Lal Kaul's words, "Lal Ded is more significantly, the maker of modern Kashmiri language as well as literature".

Kashmiri words of Sanskrit and Pali origin had undergone many phonological and morphological changes till the time of Lal Ded. Like religious preachers, Lal Ded moved and lived with the common man and used the common man's language in her discourses.

It may be kept in mind that her *vaakhs* were transmitted orally from generation to generation and have therefore been subjected to linguistic change. Some of the words of Sanskrit origin used in the *vaakhs* are :

Kashmiri	*Sanskrit*	*Meaning*
abudi	*abuddhi*	without wisdom
atúgath	*āgatah+gatah*	to come and go (rebirth)
artsun	*archanā*	worship
āhār	*āhāra*	food
prakrath	*prakriti*	nature
dīv	*dēva*	deity
swakh	*sukha*	comfort
swayam	*svayam*	oneself
kalpan	*kalpanā*	imagination
sadbā v	*sadbhāva*	good faith
kalēsh	*klēsha*	difference
mā rg	*mā rga*	path
vā kh	*vā k*	speech, utterance
yēndriy	*indriya*	the senses

Let us now analyse the *vaakhs* at different linguistic levels i.e. phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic, and note the Kashmiri features of the language or changes if any.

1. Phonological level

At phonological level many of the proto-Kashmiri features have been preserved in the *vaakhs*. For example :

i) Use of low-back vowel 'wa' instead of high back vowel 'u'.

dwarlab	*durlabh*	rare, difficult to attain
akwal	*akul*	transcendant, non-familial
amwal	*amūlya*	invaluable
swaràg	*swaraga*	heaven
wŏpdīsh	*upadēsh*	sermon

ii) Use of central-mid vowel 'aà'

baàjbath	participation, partnership
paàjy	preserved, brought up
kraàj (mās)	potter-woman

iii) Use of 'z' instead of 'j'

zagath	*jagat*	world
zal	*jala*	water
zanúm	*janma*	birth

iv) Use of 'ts' instead of 'ch'

artsun	*archana*	worship
tsēth	*chitta*	mind, consciousness
tsēnun	*chintan*	to realise, to know

v) Use of palatalization

kàmy	who
akaàly	untimely
bāvúky	full of feeling/emotion

II. Morphological level

i) Pronominalization is a very important characteristic of Kashmiri morphology, i.e. the subject and object markers attached to the verb get inflected for number and gender. Look at these *vaakhs* of Lal Ded where such forms are widely used:

a) *tanú manú gàyas bú tas kuni*
bũzum satúch gaṇṭ ā vazān
tath jāyi dhāmāyi dhāran rŏṭum
ākāsh tú prakāsh kŏrum sarú

Note the pronominal forms in this *vaakh.*

gàyas [1(f) went], *bũzúm* [I heard]
rŏṭum [I caught], *kŏrum* [I did]

b) *parun pōlum apŏruy porum*
kēsari vanú vōlum ràṭith shāl
paras pŏrnam tú pānas pōlum
adú gōm mōlũm tú zīnim hāl

the pronominal forms used are :

pōlum [I practised], *pŏrum* [t read]
vōlum [I brought down], *pŏrnam* [he read out to me]
gōm [happened to me], *zīnim* [I earned]

ii) Use of emphatic particle 'iy' / 'ay' which is used with the subject noun / pronoun:

àsiy aàsy tú àsiy āsav
asī dōr kàr patúvath
shivas sōri nú zyŏn tú marun
ravas sōri nú atúgath

Observe the emphatic forms, *iy* [only we], *àsiy* [we alone].

iii) The use of ablative case without postpositions

a) *gwaran vŏnúnam kunuy vatsun*
nĕbrú dŏpnam andar atsun
{nĕbrú (pyaṭhú) dŏpnam andar atsun} [(from) outside]

b) *gwarú kath hridyas manzbāg ràṭúm gangú zalú naàvúm tan tay man*
{gangu zalú (suúty) naàvúm tan tay man} [(with) Ganga water]

c) *āmi panú sŏdras nāvi chhas lamān*
[āmi panú (suúty) sŏdras nāvi chhas lamān] [(with) a loose spun thread]

iv) Usage of modal verbs along with main verb

atshyan āyi taygatshun gatshē [should go]
pakun gatshe dyan kyŏhō rāth [should walk]
yō ray āyi tú tūry gatshun gatshē [should go]

Note the use of *gatshe* modal verb form with MV *gatshun* [to go].

(v) The simple verb forms used by Lal Ded are now usually substituted by compound verbs in present Kashmiri :

artsun - pūzā kariny [to worship]
vatsun - kath kariny [to express]
zāyun - khatúm karun [to destroy]
shrarnun -jazúb gatshun [to get absorbed]
lārun - haàsil sapdun [to gain]
tshanḍun - phīrith yun [to wander]
sandārun - thakāvaṭh dūr kariny [to take rest]
vagē - kōbūhas manz [under control]
pushrun - havālú karun [to hand over]
trupun - mutmayīn gatshun [to be contended]

III. Syntactic level

Syntactically the language of *vaakhs* is very much closer to today's Kashmiri. From the syntactic structure of *vaakhs* it could be concluded that despite large scale borrowings from the Sanskrit at word level, Kashmiri has retained its basic sentence structure which is different from other Indo-Aryan languages and closer to European languages. Kashmiri is a SVO (subject-verb-object) language while as other Indo - Aryan languages are SOV (subject-object-verb) type. Secondly, the finite verb form is used immediately after the verb.

For example:
day chhu kunuy magarnav chhis lachha [God is one but has a thousand names]*

Most of the *vaakhs* are in simple sentences comprising of subject + verb phrase or vice versa or subject, verb and object in a row. Some of the *vaakhs* are in a question and answer form.

For example:
kus mari tú kasū māran
man kus tú māran kas
yus harú harú traðvith garú garú karē
adú suy marē tú māran tas

Who dies? Who is slain?
He who forsakes God's name and gets involved in worldly cares.
It is he who dies. It is he who is slain.

The question words used are :-

hā manshi kyāzi chhukh vuþhan seki lavar [Why?]
hā tsĕtú kavú chhuy lŏgmut par mas [Why?]

---

* The line is actually from a verse of Nund Rishi - Ed.

kavú gŏy apzis pazyuk brŏnth [How?]
kyā bŏḍakh mā bavú sarú daray [What?]
kyā karú pāntsan dàhan tú kāhan [What?]

Stress, intonation and pause are very much relevant in *vaakhs* and play important role syntactically as well as semantically for better utterance and understanding. Hence reciting or reading of *vaakhs* should be done carefully.

IV. Semantic level

Almost every *vaakh* is semantically independent and hardly overflows into another one. Each line completes the sense and has the compactness and pointedness of a proverb. Many Kashmiri idioms and proverbs have their origin either in Lal Ded's *vaakhs* or in her life and have become an integral part of Kashmiri language. Lal Ded has used the diction of common people connected with various occupations, like the potter, farmer, weaver, shepherd etc. and the similies are also chosen accordingly.

Let us now look at some of the proverbs and idioms which are very much in use today and owe their origin to Lal Ded.

Proverbs:

i) *hŏnḍ maàrytan kinú kaṭh*
lali nilúvaṭh tsali nú zānh

[Whether they kill, a ram or sheep, it is all the same for Lalleshwari. She has always a stone in her plate of food.]

ii) *āmi panú sŏdras nāvi chhas larnun*
[To row a boat across the sea with loose-spun thread.]

iii) *yinú mandúchhōkh nú chanú kyāzi chhukh mandúchhān*
[Not to be ashamed of taking birth but to hesitate from sucking milk.]

iv) *kāhan gāv rāvúny*
[Too many cooks spoil the broth. Disunity in a household.]

v) *sěki shāṭhas byōl vavun*
[To sow seeds in a desert (a wasteful effort)]

vi) *kǒmy yājyan tīl rāvrun*
[To waste oil on a dish of bran (a wasteful effort)]

vii) *rājas baḍj yěmy kartal paḍj*
[He who wields the sword a kingdom gains.]

viii) *mūḍas gyānúch kath vanúny*
[To impart knowledge to a fool.]

Idioms

tār dyun [to ferry across]
lǒh langar [worldly affairs]
abakh chhān [an untrained carpenter]
zuvbramun [to long for something]
pahli rǒs khyǒl [a shepherdless flock]
dumaṭas rīnz [to have no effect]
kharas gōr dyun [to feed jaggery to an ass]
vakh tú vatsun [to heed a precept]
ravan tyǒl [the pain of loosing]
varzan vāv [a storm]
kal ganúny [to remember badly]
àchh tālavas lagúny [to long for some one, to yearn]

Conclusion

It could be concluded that the language of Lal Ded's poetry on one the hand preserves the proto-Kashmiri characteristics despite very large borrowings from Sanskrit and on the other hand shares many linguistic features with modern Kashmiri.

To end this presentation, I would reiterate that there is certainly something great, rather spiritual in Lal Ded's poetry that it has withstood the onslaught of history and has become a part of the life of every Kashmiri speaking person today, as it was some 600 years back.

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CHAPTER 7

LAL DED AND KASHMIRI CHRONICLERS

P.N. KACHRU

The Indian tradition in chronicle writing would have suffered from a great vacuum but for the genius of the lone ranger named Kalhan Pandit of the mid-twelfth century Kashmir. While honouring his lone leadership in the tradition of Indian historiography, Kalhana too has not been able to prove himself to be a dispassionate surveyor as behoven of an ideal chronicler and historiographer. Although he has thrown light on an assortment of clans and groups who wielded power, intrigued and conspired, but at the same time he has remained aloof and unobservant of the mainstream evolution of the society and its development of socio-intellectual thought. The luminaries and philosophers who founded, propagated, built and broadened the socio-cultural vision of the society, have remained obliterated from Kalhana's chronicleship. No doubt stray references to Kshemendra's Nripavali and mere passing mention of Anandavardhana and Ratnakara, it leaves an ocean of history in oblivion. The emergence of mighty movement of Kashmiri philosophers and thinkers who, not only founded the values of *Sarvastivaad* and *Madhyamika* movement, but also laid its foundations in Central Asian, Tibetan and West Chinese regions. As many

as eighty philosophers and scholars have been identified who have founded the movements in these regions, while hundreds of them have revolutionized the Kashmirian society. Not to speak of only such scholars who enriched the Buddhist thought, but also those who led a thousand BC old *Paashupata* and *Kaalamukha* thought to the highest pinnacles of Shaivic philosophy. The great geniuses and seers like Vasugupta and Utplacharya and the founder of Shaivic philosophy, Somanandanatha, have not found any place in Kalhana's chronicle. Even the world genius like Abhinavguptapaada, who created history in the neighbourhood times of the chronicler, does not find any place in Rajatarangini. However, Kalhana's to a greater extent his impartial approach towards the events of history is the chief ornament, which his followers have brazenfacedly done with and, instead have become the committed chroniclers of court intrigues, partisans and prejudicial commentators on palace intrigues.

Jona Raj (1459 AD), the neighbour-historian of Lal Ded, while surveying through the leaves of his Dvitiya Rajatarangini, does not even mention her name who had left her mortal frame only a few years before. On the other hand, for his obvious commitments, could spare his page to Nundarishi who was a mere toddler during the concluding years of Lal Ded's life. Jona Raj states *"Malla Noordeen yawanaanaam paramagurum"*–the chiefest guru of Muslims, on whom imprisonment was imposed by the King Sultan Ali Shah during 1413-16 AD. Shrivara, in his Zaina Rajatarangini (1459 - 86 AD, Prajyabhat in his Rajavalipataka (1486 - 1513 AD) and his pupil Shuka in his Rajatarangini, all of them have remained discriminatingly unobservant of this genius of the times. These historians cannot be left uncensored for their negligence towards the culture of the land.

The Persian chronicles like Tarikh-i-Rashidi (1546 AD) of Mirza Duglat, Baharistan-i-Shahi (1614 AD), Tarikh-i-

Kashmir (1617-18 AD) of Haider Malik of Chadura, all these have followed the foot steps of their Sanskrit historians who preceded them by remaining discretely silent over the life of Lal Ded. Her personality became a direct victim of the mutilation through a prejudicial interpretation that originated from a factual incident quoted by Jona Raj in his Rajatarangini. He writes that during a hunting programme in the forests, Prince Shihab-ud-Din was confronted by a group of three *yoginis*[1]. The chief of them (*nayika*) came forward and offered the prince a cupful of wine[2]. Almost all the subsequent chroniclers carry on with the tale through the pages of their histories, wherein a leading *yogini*[3] offers a cupful to the Sultan; but these authors change the contents of the cup either into juice or milk, thus hiding the fact and saving the Sultan from the exposure of having committed an un-Islamic act. Mirza Duglat in his Tarikh-i-Rashidi (1546 AD), remains discretely silent on the issue while Baharistan-i-Shahi (1614 AD) turns the cup of wine into a cup of juice Later on another historian, Hyder Malik of Chadura, in his Tarikh-i-Kashmir (1617-18 AD) changes the cup of juice into a cup of milk[5]. Furthermore, these expressions of theirs exhibit their ignorance and blindness to the knowledge, not knowing that the wine being one of the prime accessories for consecration in the *shakta* practice and worship. It becomes glaringly obvious that these historians, while interfering with the history, projected their prejudices and fundamentalist feelings in belying, misshaping and mutilating the events.

This process of mishandling and mutilation proceeded further ravageously. The meeting of a *yogini* with the Sultan is turned, as late as in mid-seventeenth century, into the meeting in the forest with Lal Ded herself. Baba Dawood Mishakati in his Asrar-ul-abraar (1654 AD), narrates that Sultan Alla-ud-Din's elder son, Shihab-ud-Din, during his hunting tour into the forest, met with Lal Ded who, on

occasions, would roam into the forest. She asked Shihab-ud-Din and his three colleagues to rest a while, and offering him (the Sultan) a cupful of juice[6], which she got through nowhere[7]. Further down the years another historian, Narayan Kaul Ajiz in his Muntakhib-ul-Tawareekh (1710 AD) remains discretely silent on this event. Rafi-ud-Din Gafil, in his Navadir-e-Akhbar (1723 AD)[8], repeats the episodes of the forest but instead that of Lal Ded mentions the appearance of a saintly woman from nowhere[9].

This craft of manipulative chronicleship continued to slip down the mire and groped through the darkness for the stories like the meeting between Lal Ded and Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani. No doubt, Khwaja Azam Dedmari in his Waqiyat-e-Kashmir (1735-36) has referred to the story, but thanks to him and his investigative method, the Khwaja declared that after inquiry and investigation, the story could not be proved out to be correct[10].

Despite this authenticative declaration of Azam Dedmari in mid-18th century, it was as late as in mid-19th century that Birbal Kachroo in his Majmua-al-Tawarikh described the meeting of Lal Ded and Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani in a bazaar, and also stated the former's plunge into the flaming oven of a nearby baker.

Although the statements of Birbal Kachroo are flimsy enough to stand the tests of inquiry established by his predecessor Azam Dedmari only hundred years before him, it becomes necessary on our part to put Kachroo's statements to proper analysis and to a thorough dissection in order to straighten the events. The historian's statement creates an additional alarm and curiosity, as it was for the first time after more than four hundred and fifty years that the event was revealed to the author, though bereft of any proof of historic investigation.

Firstly, almost all the earlier chronicles starting from Jonarajatarangini down to mid-17th century, have remained silent about Lal Ded, it was first of all in Asrar-ul Abrar in 1654 AD that Baba Dawood Mishkati replaces the name of the *nayika* of the forest with the name of Lal Ded. Again, later on, Narain Kaul Ajiz (1710 AD), Azam Dedmari (1736 AD) and Mohammad. Aslam, till late 18th century have remained silent on the issue of the meeting with Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani. Therefore Birbal Kachroo's statement stands unrelated and untenable.

Secondly, the dating of contemporaneity also does not indicate any synchronization. Excepting the statement of Azam Dedmari, all the chroniclers have relied either on approximations or their surmises; and, therefore, cannot be relied upon. The only categoric and precise statement of her death is from Dedmari staling that Lal Ded passed away during the rule of Sultan Shihab-ud-Din that lasted from 1355 to 1373 AD. Even taking the concluding year of Sultan's rule as the year of Lal Ded's year of death, and corresponding to this very year (1373 AD) Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani was in the process of movement, along with his seven hundred associates, to enter Kashmir valley for taking refuge from Taimur's tyrannical tests of riding the blazing metal horse. So there could not be any possibility of his meeting with Lal Ded, she just then having left her mortal frame. This analysis of dating further lends strength to Dedmari's investigative statement.

Thirdly, probing further into the datings, the stay of Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani, as documented by late Professor Jaya Lal Kaul, was from 1380 to 1386 AD[10]. This statement of Professor Kaul further widens the gap of time between Lal Ded and Mir Sayyed Ali Hamadani.

My reliability on the two sources—Dedmari's Tarikh-i-Kashmir and late Professor Jaya Lal Kaul's book on Lal Ded—is based, in the first case, on author's decisive and categoric statement about precise period and, in second case, for late Professor's dispassionate observance and study of documents as an observer and an outsider to the happenings of history and its documentations. Not only this, the late Professor stands out, till today, the lone ranger who has stood firm to set right the record of fictitious chronicleship, of which Lal Ded became a direct victim.

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2. *Shidhu chashakam*
3. They use the Persian word *afifah*, which means a spiritual lady.
4. He calls it *kasir-e-sharbati.*
5. Terming it as *kasir-e-shir.*
6. And not as originally stated by Jonaraja.
7. The author's actual statement runs thus: "*.........Dar aan zamaan Saltanti opisari mehtar ki Shahaab-ud-din bood dar jangle azmurah daur-e shikaar me raft, dar aan zamaan Lalla Arifa gah gah dar dashto bayaabaan megushata roz-e-dar aan shikaar gaah ba-Shahaab-ud-din mulaaqat shud........*"

8-9. "*Zani az alam namudaar shud*"

10. "*Nazdi arbaabi tehqiq saabit na shud*"

11. "Lal Ded", by Prof. Jaya Lal Kaul, Sahitya Akademi publication.

CHAPTER 8

LAL VAAKHS—THEIR JOURNEY FROM MEMORY TO MANUSCRIPT

S.N. PANDITA

PROLOGUE

Lal Ded remains the tallest icon of the Kashmiri society adored for the last 600 years for the high spiritual, moral and philosophical content of her wise sayings, the *vaakhs*. And it is on this account that many scholars have delved deep into the essence of these *vaakhs*. However, very little account has been given of the history of their compilation and collation. Before the *vaakhs* came to be published, as is the Indian tradition, they were passed by word of mouth from generation to generation in Kashmir.

Unfortunately, and if I say, regrettably as well, the records made by cultural historians on this account have been approximation of facts sometimes even lacking essential details. To cite a few examples, I refer to the following published papers :-

1. 'Lalleshawari's Contribution to Kashmiri Culture' by Prof. B.N. Parimoo.

2. 'Lalleshwari : An apostle of Human Values' by Prof. K.N. Dhar.

Both these appear in Prof. S. Bhatt's acclaimed edited book 'Kashmiri Pandits - A Cultural Heritage', at pages 479 and 114 respectively.

Prof. Parimoo writes, "Some anonymous Shaivite scholar recorded these in manuscript found later with a Kashmiri Brahmin Shri Dharam Das Derwesh of Gucch village near Sharda. This manuscript was discovered in 1914 by Pt. Mukund Ram Shastri, Head Assistant, Research Department, Kashmir Government who handed it over to Sir George Grierson". And Prof. K.N. Dhar writes, "Towards the close of the 19th century these *vaakhs* were collected and translated through the efforts of Sir Aurel Stein and Sir George Grierson and Dr. Barnett rendered them into English verse".

It is evident that the two accounts are not in agreement and differ in details. Secondly, as and when, however, the *vaakhs* were finally published, it has been always made out that their publication was due the sole effort of Western scholars. The eminent scholars here attention seminar and the learned audience may bear me out when I say that it would have been virtually impossible for the Western scholars to deal with *vaakhs* without the help of Kashmiri scholars and yet cultural historians have given no deserving details of their contribution in the collation and final publication of Lal Ded's *vaakhs*.

It is on account of these factors that I try to make mends for these errors and omissions in my paper "Lal *Vaakhs*— Their Journey from Memory to Manuscript". I strongly believe that history is facts and not fancy particularly when we write our own history.

Lalleshwari of Kashmir, more popularly called by homely and simple name Lal Ded, was one of those master spirits, who come at periodic intervals into this world and deliver a message of truth and peace exhorting the humanity to follow higher ideals of life and shun the frivolities of mortal earthly existence. She was an apostle of sweetness and light and follower of the Shaiva philosophy. She is remembered with divine adoration by both Hindus and Muhammadans in Kashmir.

Lal Ded propounded the Yoga philosophy and also high moral values in Kashmiri verse. These are called Lalvakhs or sayings of Lal Ded, and according to Pandit Anand Koul, "Apart from being the utterances of a holy woman expressive of grand and lofty thoughts and spiritual laws-short, apt, sweet, thrilling, life-giving and pregnant with greatest moral principles, are simply pearl and diamonds and gems of the purest ray serene of Kashmir literature. They are current coins of quotations, a volume being packed in a single saying. They touch the Kashmiri's ear as well as the chord of his heart and are freely quoted by him as maxims on appropriate occasions in conversation having moulded the national mind and set up a national ideal". Her sayings illustrate her religion on its popular side, though they are not a systematic exposition of Shaivism on the lines laid down by the theologians who preceded her. In fact what we have in her poems is not mere book religion as evolved in the minds of great thinkers and idealists, but a picture of actual hopes and fears of the common folk that normally followed the teachings of the wise men whom they accepted as guides.

Her sayings give indeed an account often in vivid and picturesque language of the actual working out, in practice, of a religion previously worked out in theory. As such, Lalla's work was a unique contribution to the body evidence that

necessarily formed the basis of future history of one of the most important religions in India. This was thus something worth investigation in her sayings having such an effect on the minds of the people to whom they were addressed. There are few countries in the world in which so many wise saws and proverbial sayings are current as in Kashmir. Hinton Knowles, in his Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs, collected some 1600. None of these proverbs have greater repute than Lallavakyani.

There is not a Kashmiri who has not some of them ready on the tip of his tongue and who does not reverence her memory. According to Carnac Temple, there were countless sayings of Lal Ded but as time went on they were gradually one by one forgotten and lost.

The ancient Indian system, to quote George Grierson's words, "by which literature is recorded not on paper but on the memory and carried down from generation to generation of teachers and pupils is still in complete survival in Kashmir. Such fleshy tables of heart are often more trustworthy than birch bark or paper manuscripts. The reciters even when learned pandits take every care to deliver the messages word for word as they received them, whether they understand them or not."

A typical instance of this occurred in the experience of George Grierson. In the autumn of 1896, Aurel Stein took down in writing from the mouth of a professional story—teller Hatim, a native Kashmiri, a collection of folk tales which he subsequently made over to George Grierson for editing and translating. In the course of dictation, the narrator, according to custom conscientiously reproduced words of which he did not know the sense. They were old words, the significance of which had been lost and which had been passed down

to him through generations of teachers. That they were no inventions of the moment or corruptions by the speaker is shown by the fact that not only were they recorded simultaneously by well-known Kashmiri scholar Pandit Govind Kaul, who was equally ignorant of their meanings and who also accepted them without hesitation on the authority of the reciter–Hatim Tilwony–but that long afterwards, at Sir George Grierson's request, Sir Aurel Stein urged the man to repeat the passages in which the words occurred. They were repeated by Hatim, *verbatim, literatim, et punctuatim,* as they had been recited by him to Aurel Stein and Govind Kaul fifteen years before. And here it is pertinent to mention that there were no authentic manuscripts of Lalla's compositions too. Collections made by private individuals were occasionally put together, but none of the texts of Lalla's sayings was complete and no two agreed in contents or text. There was thus a complete dearth of ordinary manuscript of *Lallavaakhs*. But fortunately, on the other hand, there were sources from which an approximately correct text could be secured.

About 270 years ago, Pt. Bhaskar Razdan, grandfather of Pt. Manas Razdan, a celebrated hermit of Kashmir, collected sixty sayings of Lal Ded. Another collection of 107 sayings including the 60 collected by Pt. Bhaskar Razdan was made by Pt. Lakshman Kak, another saint who lived in about 1865. In 1850, another learned Pandit named Prakash Kokilu just wrote commentary of Lalla's four *vaakhs*. However, the first scientific collection of Lalla's verses were recorded under very similar conditions as those of the Hatim's Tales.

In the year 1914, Sir George Grierson asked his friend and assistant Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri to obtain for him a good copy of the Lalla Vakyani, as these verses were commonly called by the Pandits of Kashmir. After much search, Pandit Mukund Ram was unable to find a satisfactory

manuscript. But finally he came in to touch with a very old Brahmin named Dharam Das Darvesh of the village of Gush, about thirty miles from Baramulla and not far from the famous shrine of Sharada. Just as the professional story teller Hatim mentioned above recited the folktales so too Dharam Das Darvesh made his business for the benefit of piously disposed to recite Lalla's songs as he had received by family tradition–the *kula parampara achara krama*. The great preceptor Mahamahopadhyay Mukund Ram Shastri recorded the text from his dictation and added commentary, partly in Hindi and, partly in Sanskrit, all of which he forwarded to Sir George Grierson in England. These materials formed the basis of first authentic edition of *Lallavaakhs*. It cannot claimed to be founded on a collation of various manuscripts, but it can at least be said that they were an accurate reproduction of one recension of the sayings current in Kashmir then.

As in case of Hatim's folk tales, this too contained words and passages of which the reciter did not profess to understand. He had every inducement to make verses intelligible and any conjectural emendation would at once have been accepted on his authority. But following the traditions of his calling, he had the honesty to refrain from this and said simply that this was what he had received. "Such a record is in some respects more valuable than any written manuscript", observed Grierson.

Nevertheless, in producing the text, Sir George Grierson collated some other manuscripts also, notably two from Stein's collection deposited in the Bodilyan Library, Oxford and a few Sanskrit translations of the *vaakhs*. So that on whole it can be said fairly that he did succeed in getting the actual text of what Lal Ded left behind her.

The Lalla Vakyani were composed in an old form of Kashmiri which as a distinct language is much older than her time and it is not probable that we have them in the exact from in which she uttered them. The fact that they had been transmitted by word of mouth prohibits such a proposition.

As the language changed insensibly from generation to generation so must the outward form of the verses have changed in recitation. But nevertheless respect for the authoress and material form of songs has preserved great many archaic forms of expression.

It is worthwhile pointing out here that the Vedic hymns were for centuries handed down by the word of mouth and that Lalla's sayings give a valuable example of the manner in which Kashmiri language must have changed from generation to generation before the text was finally established. Passing on to the metres of Lalla's sayings it may be mentioned that there are two distinct meteric systems in Kashmir. One for formal works such as epic poems and like and in this, Persian meter Bahar-e-Hajaj is employed, the other usual in songs like Lalla's sayings the meter depends solely on stress accent. This meterical system is used in songs and is by no means so simple a matter.

Here I quote George Grierson, "I regret that during my own stay in Kashmir I neglected to study it and when after my return to this country (England) I endeavoured to ascertain from native sources what rules were followed in such composition, I failed to obtain any definite information. All that I could gather was that a poet scanned his verses by ear. A long and minute examination of scores of songs led me to no certain conclusion beyond the fact that a stress accent seemed to play an important part. Here and there I came across traces of well-known meters but nowhere even allowing for the fullest license did they extend over more than few lines at a time."

In the year 1917, Sir Aurel Stein had the occasion to visit Kashmir again and with his ever inexhaustive kindness to Grierson undertook to investigate the question. He placed the problem before Nityanand Shastri. With the help of a *shravaka* or professional reciter, Nityanand Shastri ascertained definitely that in Lalla's songs the meter depends solely on the stress accent. In Lalla's verses four stresses go to each *pada* or line.

It was in the year 1920 that the Royal Asiatic Society, London published as one of its monographs Vol. (XVII) as Lalla Vakyani. They were edited with translation, notes and vocabulary by Sir George Grierson and Dr. Lionel Barnett. It was a work of great scholarship, each of the editors taking his share with consummate mystery of a different subject. Sir George Grierson as to the linguistic and Dr. Barnett as to the philosophic phase of it.

Truth is the rich legacy left behind by our mystical poets and Kashmiris can well boast of rich treasure of poetry of Lalla's denomination. It is sublime, exalted poetry which elevates thoughts, purifies emotions and brings plenitude of peace to the mind. Apart from being an integral part of our literature the best part of Lalla vaakhs, without fear of contradiction, is the indelible mark it has left on the thought and conduct of a normal Kashmiri. And lastly one cannot omit to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to Bhaskar Razdan, Pandit Lakshman Kak, Pandit Prakash Kokilu, Sir George Grierson, Dr. Lionel Barnett and Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri who according to Carnac Temple, was a direct descendent in line of pupils from Vasugupta, the founder of modern Shaivism in Kashmir and Pandit Nityanand Shastri whom Stein described as the "scholar of scholars" and "a crest jewel among the scholars of Kashmir" who took all the pains to dig out the *vaakhs* of Lal Ded and to purify them of the dross that had collected around them over the centuries.

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CHAPTER 9

LALLESHWARI THE LIBERATOR

DWARKA NATH MUNSHI

At the outset I must confess of my not being equal to the task of speaking before this august gathering of researchers, scholars and recognized and accomplished students of the subject of this seminar–Lal Ded–of whom I know but little. I will, therefore, be brief and ask for your indulgence.

Much of whatever relates to Lal Ded–her birth, life, work, philosophy, her *vaakh*, their actual number and import, her beliefs in short everything about her has been variously put. It will not be far wrong to say that no two persons have agreed on much about her. Nor have they been able always to reach and produce the depth of meaning and import in translation which has generally been literal and superficial as one can discern when one reads or listens to the *vaakh*. For even such *vaakh* as are seemingly put in straight words are pregnant with an extraordinary depth and loftiness. It was perhaps the entirely new light thrown on a long dark period that this had naturally resulted in giving currency to contentious, conflicting facts, misunderstandings, misconceptions, misrepresentations et al consequently confusion persisted. The more that has been written and researched about the subject, the more has the confusion grown.

Basic Facts

Yet there are basic facts that can be stated without fear of any contradiction, for instance, that she was born a Hindu and married in a Hindu family. Available evidence also makes it out that women in those hoary times were imparted general and spiritual education which Lalla must have received in large measure during her early life. Clearly, she must have imbibed it all, which is evident from the superb quality and content of her *vaakh.*

Another important aspect related to her being is that she believed in the concept of transmigration of soul as well as of the cycle of *yugas*, the changing aeons of time through creation destruction and regeneration of the universe. According to what we have of her *tete-ted* with her Guru Sidha Mol, she had reminded him, of what both knew, of their past several lives of which she had vivid memories. She may have accumulated more light and knowledge in that process. Further, she must have received ethereal inspiration. All this would have resulted in her attaining super-consciousness. Above all, Lal Ded was a sublime person of piercing perception, a great humanitarian philosopher and, indeed, the greatest of Kashmiri poets to this day.

I like to believe that there may not be a Kashmiri Hindu, Muslim or others who have not heard of her greatness or who do not revere her even in these times when irreverence is an article of facetious modernity.

Rebel of Her Time

Lal Ded lived the life of a rebel in many ways. Whatever she said or did had some innovation and mission behind it to correct the prevailing wrong beliefs and practices, and show the path to piety. Before her, Kashmiri verse was primarily written in a way as could be used to memorise

esoteric doctrine. But she created *vaakh* to express aspiration and experience, thought and feeling in her own effective way, sometimes vivid and direct and sometimes allegorical. She was thus a pioneer of Kashmiri language and verse as only a poet of an extraordinary force of originality could be– a poet whose poesy is in one of her great admirers Richard Temple's words "aflame with red fire of a thought that burns".

Grierson who is reputed to have researched her works and is considered an authority, has observed that the *vaakh* are besides "an account, often in vivid and picturesque language, of the actual working out in practice a religion previously worked out in theory. It is a unique contribution to the body of evidence that must necessarily form the basis of a future history of one of the most important religious systems of India."

More than the style thus, it was the content that was wholly revolutionary. For instance, she minced no words in expressing her revolt against the traditional ways of worship or offering sacrifice to the deities and idols. I will offer one striking example which says it all, and more. Lamented she in a much quoted *vaakh* against animal sacrifice offered to stone idols thus: "This animal, the sheep, gives you wool to protect you from cold and cover your privacy, and for itself it subsists just on God-given grass and water. Who then has ordained you, O ignoramus Pandit, that you slaughter it to offer to a stone?" The *vaakh*, as many others, also lays before us the extent of the Sanskrit- rooted Kashmiri language put together in soft yet powerful hard knocking words, cutting criticism of the practices in vogue.

Here I also make bold to suggest what I think needs to be understood and interpreted quite differently than how even Grierson did. It is about the *vaakh* in which she mentions

of having received her Guru's precept of "From without withdraw your gaze within, and fix it on the inmost self". She is then made out to have cast away her apparel to go about dancing in the nude. Some scholars have, no doubt, disputed or rejected this interpretation. Lal Ded was too serene and knowing a *yogini* to have taken such a frivolous meaning of a profound expression. When one analyses it in the context of the profundity of both the Guru and the disciple Lalla, it most likely was meant for her to recognize that the external world is only an illusion of no value. So Lal Ded lived on as a wandering savant in total abandon, unmindful of the external world and only seeking God-consciousness.

A *vaakh* of hers illustrates this, e.g., "Thou were absorbed in thine own self, hidden from me, I passed whole days in seeking the out. But when I saw thee in mine own self, O, joy then Thou and I disported ourselves in ecstasy ". Or, again, "Pilgrim *sannyasi* goes from shrine to shrine expecting to meet Him who abides within his own self."

Among the most telling of Lal Ded's *vaakh* are those which bear a constant refrain of the Upanishadic tenets of the equality and oneness of all which is the cardinal principle enunciated and dilated upon in *Gita* in many of its *shlokas*. I give here a summary of a few : "Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere, then do not discriminate between one and the other. If thou art wise, know they self. That is the true knowledge of God."

In another one she advises, "Not by ascetic practices is the self realized. Nor by desire can you gain the portals of Release." It goes on and on and deeper as well as clearer all the way. In fact she had practised what she was professing, she had risen above the feelings of pain or pleasure, love and hate, heat or cold and all that we normal humans experience. She was leading people to attain liberation from the mundane ills and pains as she had attained it herself.

These translations of the various *vaakh* have been taken from the masterly works of the late Prof. Jaya Lal Kaul and abbreviated by me for the present purpose. Any mistakes that may have crept in are however only mine, with apologies to the revered Professor.

To measure the greatness of Lal Ded is to attempt to measure the dimensions of the oceans. Therefore when we talk of her we can only pay our humbly obeisance and salutations in her repeating to ourselves her greatness as if we need to prove it.

Lal Ded, Lalla, Lalleshwari or Lala Arifa or Lalla Mats, are among the numerous names by which she is called, but always with extreme reverence and love and adoration. She does not belong to any one community or creed or religion for she had risen above these distinctions. She was too great for them. She had attained to being a universal phenomenon in her own life time and then to being a priceless heritage for humankind. Trying to appropriate her to any one religion whose narrow limits she had set out to demolish, is to try to contain a sea in a tea-cup, a meritless task.

Lalla's sublime philosophy is humanity's immeasurable treasure of pure spirituality, quintessentially she had reached divinity and merged with the divine. And divinity is not divisible. Humanity's part in it is to understand it and live up to it which was never needed more than now when narrow and laboured fundamentalism and materialism is corroding the roots of harmony and nobility.

I will not take any more of your time in going into other details to establish the pre-eminence of Lal Ded as a poet-philosopher of the highest order. But I will put before you enigmatic points which need to be examined and explained for a better and clearer understanding of the priceless

contributions our Lal Ded has made for the betterment of humanity. My trouble arises when I see that the works of the person of Lal Ded's eminence have remained confined to the Valley and that too not spread out to all sections of the society there. And what is no less important is that she has remained only a name in the exclusive academic circles of the country as a whole when poet philosophers in other languages, neighbouring and distant, and not necessarily of the same merit and impact as of Lal Ded, have earned extensive exposure and appreciation and popularity. Is it because her vaakh were not appropriately and intensively translated into their languages for the benefit of the masses who could not understand the meaning and depth of Lal Ded in the original *vaakh* of Upanishadic and Trika heights. Or is it because most other poet saints projected saintliness and sin in terms of the body, its pains and ultimate death, when Lal Ded largely disregarded that and expounded on the super consciousness and the liberation of the soul. I put it in all humility to you persons of scholarship and wisdom, for enlightenment.

Section 2

BOOK EXTRACT

CHAPTER 10

LAL DED

PROF. JAYALAL KAUL

The Life and Legend of Lal Ded

We have no record, contemporary or near-contemporary, of Lal Ded in any chronicle or otherwise. It is only as late as about the middle of eighteenth century that she begins to be taken notice of. Khwaja Muhammad Azam Dedamari writes :

Lalla Arifa, a saintly mystic of the highest order, devoted to God, flourished during the reign of Sultan Alau-ud-Din. In the early period of her life she was bound in wedlock, a prisoner of family life and household chores, but at the same time she became God-intoxicated and having given herself up to a life detachment and retirement, she passed sometime in seclusion away from the people. She passed away during the reign of Sultan Shihab- ud-Din.

For these reasons, Lal Ded's date of birth may be presumed to be sometime between 1317 and 1320, may be earlier but very likely not later than 1320. It may be earlier, as early as A.D. 300-01, if chroniclers Hasan and Miskin are to be believed, and there seems to be no reason why the others, like Shayiq for instance, should be believed in

preference to them. The corresponding date of her death, then, would be about A.D. 1372, that is, during Shihab-ud-Din's reign as Dedamari has told us, if the date of birth be taken as 1301; or it would be sometime between A.D. 1388 and 1320 respectively, calculating 71 years as a fairly advanced age for the times.

Like the lives of saints everywhere else, the life of Lal Ded is shrouded in myth, miracle and legend, but in the words of Tor Andrae, "We need to become acquainted with the great personalities of the world religions in those garments in which the pious faith of their followers have clothed them... Something of the magic of their personalities which we might not understand in any other way, speaks to us through the poetry of faith". Myths and miracles that surround saints' lives not only enrich hagiology or indicate the veneration in which the saints have been held but, often enough, they also illumine their teachings and become spiritually significant allegories.

All legends are agreed on Lal Ded's having been born in a Brahmin family where, from a child, she not only imbibed the atmosphere of piety and religion but also where she came under the influence of Siddha Shrikantha or Siddha Mol (venerable Siddha), and learned certain spiritual *sadhanas* (disciplines). There is evidence of the fact that in those times, liberal education was imparted to women. From a study of her *vaakh*, one is persuaded to believe that she was educated during the early part of her life at her father's house. There is unanimous agreement also that she was married in to a Brahmin family of Pampor where she was cruelly treated by her mother-in-law.

Lalla Vaakh : The Text

We have several collections of her verse sayings but there has been no attempt at collecting them, except partly,

by Grierson and Barnett ; and there has hardly been any textual criticism worth the name. They were not contemporaneously collected and recorded in a manuscript; the manuscripts of a later date that have been available are not complete and "no two agree in contents and text"; and there is no doubt that they have largely been handed down by oral tradition. But as Sir George Grierson rightly observes, the want of a complete manuscript of Lal Ded's compositions need not make us doubt the authenticity of them. For to quote his words, "the ancient Indian system by which literature is recorded not on paper but on the memory, and carried down from generation to generation of teachers and pupils, is still in complete survival in Kashmir. Such fleshy tables of the heart are often more trustworthy than birch-bark or paper manuscripts". After all, the Vedic hymns were handed down by word of mouth for centuries. Moreover, Sir George had a proof of the almost infallibility of such oral tradition in the collection of folktales by Sir Aurel Stein in 1896. Sir Aurel had taken them down in writing from the mouth of a professional story teller and when, fifteen years later, at Sir George's request, he got the story teller to repeat certain passages, they were repeated by him *verbatim, literatim et punctuatim.*

I therefore made searching enquiries for them in different parts of the Kashmir Valley and my labours were fortunately rewarded by my being able to obtain 75 more sayings, there are a few more verses besides those contained in these two collections, making it all a total of 258 vaakh.

Speaking of Grierson's scholarly edition of Lalla Vakyani, I said that, on the whole, he succeeded in giving us an authentic text of Lal Ded's verse-sayings. As I shall endeavour to make clear, we cannot vouch for the authenticity, beyond doubt, of each one of the verses included in the edition.

Nor can any reliable inference regarding the authenticity of authorship of these verses be deduced from their being rhymed, unrhymed or written in blank verse. It is argued that since blank verse is a recent, a post-1947, literary phenomenon in Kashmiri, therefore the 'blank verse vaakh' attributed to Lal Ded are either spurious or a corrupted form of the original. This argument may be summarily dismissed. Firstly, Persian, and therefore rhyme as an indispensable adjunct of verse, had not yet become a subject for study in *maktabs* which indeed had not till then come in to existence. Secondly whatever education Lal Ded might have had would be in Sanskrit and Old Kashmiri, then prevalent. And thirdly Sanskrit and Old Kashmiri need not have, and usually do not have any rhyme at all though Shiti Kantha's Mahanayaprakasha does have rhyme, each quatrain rhyming *ab ab*. The opposite is, indeed, a true argument : other things being equal, the absence of rhyme would indicate an earlier origin of the verse. And two hundred years or more later when the first copy of Nurnama came to be written, rhyme had become popular and necessary for verse under the predominant influence of Persian. Nor may we underestimate the predilection of folk poetry or scribes and calligraphists to substitute rhyme and more familiar word wherever possible or even to change the sense of the verse somewhat for the sake of rhyme, particularly when these slight changes and easy exercises in verse would, in the words of Ibn Khaldun, confirm their "attachment to certain opinions and schools of thought".

In these circumstances and in the absence of all external evidence we have to fall back upon the internal evidence of the text itself, whatever its probative force. Even this has severe limitations. There are no allusions or references in Lalla vaakh to contemporary events or to any to any events that can be firmly dated. To determine their authenticity,

therefore, we are left with only the evidence of diction and prosody, and the quality of cast of thought, the way it is organized in the process of expression, in a word, the characteristic style of Lal Ded. Fortunately there are a fairly substantial number of them which are indubitably hers and have been up to date regarded so by all. These can help us as nothing else can to tell her vaakh from those that have been the creation of others but are wrongly ascribed to her, for these do not bear the characteristic Lal Ded stamp. Caution, however, is necessary in at least two respects. First, we may not test the authenticity of her vaakh merely on the basis of any one of these criteria, taken singly. The better test will rather be the totality of impression gathered from judging the vaakh in question on the bases of all the criteria as a whole. Secondly, it should be evident that a trustworthy judgement can be based only on a careful and sufficient study of the whole body of Lalla vaakh with all their variants (of which there are indeed many) and not on a selection or a part of them. It need hardly be stressed that whatever the criteria and their soundness and sufficiency, we have to depend ultimately on the sensibility and discrimination, theoretical intelligence, of the critic. Perhaps, a third caution should be suggested, namely, a comparison, linguistic and literary, with whatever Kashmiri literature is available to us of the contemporary period, both preceding and succeeding Lalla vaakh, which would obviously demand a competent knowledge of works like Shitikantha's *Mahanayaprakasha*, Bhattavatara's *Banasuravadha*, Ganaka Prashasta's *Sukhdu-khacaritam* and, possibly, also of the snatches and fragments of old Kashmiri that occur as quotations in several Trika Darshana texts. But there is herein a snag, already hinted at. Undoubtedly Lalla *vaakh* were composed in, what may appropriately be called Old Kashmiri; but for reasons already discussed above, they have come down to us in a language

surprisingly modern. They were transmitted by word of mouth and underwent change according as language itself changed insensibly from generation to generation. "Nevertheless", as Sir George Grierson rightly observes, "respect for the authoress and the metrical form of the songs have preserved a great many archaic forms of expressions". And I may add, this preservation has been possible because some men and women direct in line of *gurushishyaparampara*, in the direct line, that is, of guru-disciple succession, memorised the vaakh to become a part of their daily morning prayer and *swadhyaya*, self-study. Obviously, it is they who preserved them with religious care and exactitude; for even while they did not understand words and phrases here and there, they had the honesty to refrain from any conjectural emendation to make the verses intelligible". It is for this reason that Sir George holds such a record in some respects more valuable than any written manuscript.

Lallavaakh : The Content

At the very outset, it should be pointed out that the vaakh already available have not been arranged on any clear-cut basis. Lal Ded did not compose her vaakh as a deliberate contribution to literature or philosophy, she did not sing them nor write them for *kirtan*, devotional recitation and singing, as the later-day *bhakta* saint-singers did. Nor was she a preacher, an evangelist, or a reformer. Her verses, mainly the outpourings of her soul, are an expression of her inner experience and, sometimes though rarely, of her comment on what she observed around her. This notwithstanding, it is possible to arrange the vaakh as to facilitate discerning her progressive spiritual ascent, and they have been so placed here in their translation at the end. There are we may discern, a few (not many though) *vaakh* which express the state of her mind when she has an overpowering sense of desolation

and aloneness. She seems to have developed an almost oppressive sense of emptiness within her and in the world about her. She feels alone, towing her boat upon the sea with a rope of untwisted thread; she is wasting away like water in cups of unbaked clay; there is a yawning pit underneath and she is dancing overhead. It is not the usual sad generalities about the world, this vale of tears, this house of pain, and the like that we have; on the contrary we have a direct impact of her misery, her tension, her earnest expostulation with herself:

> I will weep and weep for you, my Soul,
> The world has caught you in its spell.
> Though you cling to them with the anchor of steel,
> Not even the shadow of the things you love
> Will go with you when you are dead.

Lal Ded : The Maker of Kashmiri

Lal Ded has, however, not merely the chronological distinction of being placed first in time in the order of modern Kashmiri poets. She is, more significantly, the maker of modern Kashmiri, language as well as literature. As poet, in her own genre, vaakh, as well as generally, she remains unsurpassed. This appears to be the language of exaggeration; and I am conscious of the fact that, often enough, we have double standards for critical judgement which we use in favour of the *mahakavis* (the great poets) of modern Indian literatures. I am conscious also of my inability to put across in an alien language the full import and impact of Lal Ded's *vaakh*.

Lal Ded : Her Times and Milieu

I have found it difficult to establish any relationship between the vaakh of Lal Ded and the age in which she lived, the relationship between literature and society of the kind

that would satisfy what we have come to call a "progressive modern mind", except perhaps in a very general and meaningless way. I have felt that a more profitable line of research would be to discover whatever literary tradition we might, that is, the continuity of it, sometimes obvious, sometimes less obvious, in those remote days and, for the purpose, to study Mahanayaprakasha and even the earlier fragments of quotation which which we meet in some Shaiva texts and commentaries on them. That would, I hope, not only enrich our understanding of Old Kashmiri and its literature but also give us a sense of the continuity of development, a historical perspective, as a whole, of whatever literature we have. If this were done (and it cannot be done here), we could, so to say, place Lal Ded, against the background of her times, that aspect of it, those literary and extra-literary events and influences which help in understanding individual talent and its creative expression.

Lal Ded : A Reappraisal

A reappraisal of Lal Ded has become necessary. I have endeavoured to determine certain probabilities regarding the dates of her birth and death, and pointed out the improbability of some of the anecdotes and legends that have cluttered the meagre material of her life story. I have also tried to examine the authenticity of her vaakh and to identify and isolate the spurious among them, again with a good measure of probability perhaps but not certainty. I have subjected to scrutiny some of the well-meaning but inexact, even incorrect, laudatory things said about her; for it is time we stopped building her image on such facile opinions.

After clearing all this out of the way, we may well ask : What then have been the significance of Lal Ded ? Her role as the maker of Kashmiri, both language and literature has been discussed in chapter four. We may here say that though

Kashmiri has had a much longer history, and Kalhana records for us what is said to be "the earliest specimen" of Kashmiri, yet we can for good reason acclaim Lal Ded as the progenitor of modern Kashmiri. She is the first among the moderns not only chronologically but in the modern quality of interrogation and expostulation in her poetry. Her poetry is modern because it comes alive for us even today. Indeed she helped us Kashmiris, to discover our mother-tongue and our soul as a people.

Translations - some examples :

1. *ami pana so'dras navi chas laman...*
   With a rope of loose-spun thread am I towing
   My boat upon the sea.
   Would that God heard my prayer
   And brought me safe across !
   Like water in cups of unbaked clay
   I run to waste.
   Would God I were to reach my home !

7. *atshyan ay ta gatshun gatshe...*
   For ever we come, for ever we go;
   For ever, day and night, we are on the move.
   Whence we come, thither we go,
   For over in a round of birth and death,
   From nothingness to nothingness.
   But sure, a mystery here abides,
   A something is there for us to know.
   (it cannot all be meaningless)

111. *kenh chiy ne 'ndri ha' tiy vudiy...*
   Some though asleep are yet awake:
   Some though awake are yet asleep;
   Despite ablutions some are unclean;
   Some, by their actions, are untouched.

(Condensed by Bhuvanesh Kaul and Maj.Gen. A. Kaul)

CHAPTER 11

LALLESHWARI AND KABIR

PROF. C.L. SAPRU

The medieval period is important in Indian history for a number of reasons. After the advent of Islam, a process of acculturation started in India that inspired thinkers, saints and poets. An astonishing feature of this process was that though the saint- poets belonged to different regions, and wrote in different Indian languages, the ideas they expressed were remarkably similar. Their poetry had a tremendous impact on the entire age and it opened a new chapter of synthesis in Indian culture. Take Lalleshwari and Kabir, for example. They were two different persons, living in two different regions, but there was an amazing degree of similarity in their ideas. This was due to the harmony that prevailed in the society and the political and religious conditions of the times.

Lalleshwari is popularly called Lal Ded by common Kashmiris. She was born in a cultured Kashmiri Brahmin family, and had a disastrous married life in which she had to suffer great torture like lovelorn Mira. A hostile mother-in-law and a suspicious husband forced her to break the fetters of social bindings and codes of behaviour, and she set out on the course of spiritual quest. She was guided on

this path by Siddha Mol, her Guru. Siddha Mol was a Kashmiri Shaivite scholar and his teachings broadened Lalleshwari's mental horizon. Lalleshwari's birth is an actual fact of history and she was real person who lived in age of transition which saw the decline of Hindu political power and rise of Muslim political power in Kashmir. It was a period of great conflict, and was marked by religious oppression, tyranny, chaos and political turmoil in Kashmir.

With the decline of Hindu power, a state of despondency prevailed among the common people and a sense of insecurity gripped their minds. In Iran, Taimur had unleashed an atmosphere of terror and tyranny, as a result of which religious missionaries known as Sayyids fled from there in their hundreds . As many as five hundred of them came to Kashmir led by Sayyid Ali Hamadani who has been given the name of Shah-i-Hamadan by Kashmiri Muslims. Sayyid Ali Hamadani played a prominent role in propagating Islam in Kashmir. It is said that he met Lalleshwari and was amazed by her spiritual powers.

Kabir too was born in similar political, social and religious circumstances. And it was because of this similarity of circumstances in which they took their birth that many of their beliefs, ideas and ideals also coincided. Kabirdas was brought up in a low caste family of weavers. He did not acquire spiritual knowledge in the regular way. It was in the company of saints and great religious personalities that he came to be acquainted with spiritual concepts and devotional lore. Lalleshwari, on the other hand, got the opportunity to learn religious texts, in particular those related to Kashmir Shaivism, when she stayed with her Guru Siddha Mol at his house. The spark of devotion was ignited, and the light of wisdom illumined her mind. Kabir's fame spread throughout the length and breadth of North India. His verses were

included by the Sikhs in their holy book, the *Granth Sahib*. But Lalleshwari's name remained confined to Kashmir alone, probably due to geographical reasons.

Conflict between Hindu and Islamic cultures in Kashmir Valley resulted in continuous political reverses for the Hindus, but at the social level there was a happy interchange between the two communities. A process of synthesis between Islam and Vedanta (Kashmir Shaivism in the Valley) started preparing the ground for the development of Sufism. In Kashmir, *Sufis* were given the name of *Rishis* by the common people. Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, the founder of the Rishi Order, known as *Alamdar-i-Kashmir* or the Standard Bearer of Kashmir, was also called Nunda Rishi. It may be recalled that his famous shrine was burnt down by the notorious Pakistani terrorist Mast Gul three years back. Sheikh Nur-ud-Din's grave lies inside this shrine along with the graves of his twelve disciples, two of them being Hindu, namely Rupa Rishi and Lakhyman (Lakshman) Rishi.

Nunda Rishi was greatly influenced by Lalleshwari, who was his senior contemporary. He has expressed his reverence for her in these famous lines of his:

> Just as you bestowed your grace on Lalla of Padmanpur
> Grant me the self-same boon, O God

There are scholars who have compared Lalleshwari to Mira. It is true that she stopped caring about social codes of honour and about family responsibilities and set out in the quest of the Beloved, but there is one basic difference between her and Mira. Whereas Mira was attracted by the physical charms of Krishna, and became a devotee of the *saguna* or God with attributes, Lalleshwari was devoted to the *nirguna* or God without attributes. It was the path of knowledge as propounded in Vedanta and Shaiva philosophy. Mira

appeals to us emotionally, while Lalleshwari impresses us at the intellectual level. If Lalleshwari is to be compared to any Hindi poet it can be Mahadevi or else Kabir. Lalleshwari and Kabir can be regarded as two sides of the same coin. If Kabir is opposed to external rituals and superstitious beliefs, so is Lalleshwari. In one of her *vaaks* (verses), she assails empty bookish knowledge. The Pandits are churning water, she says, how can they hope to obtain butter from it? 'They read the *Gita* as a pretension, just as the parrot repeats the name of Rama in the cage. It makes them only more and more self-conceited. Even after reading it they remain as ignorant as ever. I too have read the Gita and am still reading it.' This looks something quite similar to what Kabir says in this *saakhi* (couplet) of his:

> People weary themselves out reading books after books
> But that does not make anyone learned
> He who reads just the few letters of the word 'love'
> Alone is really learned

Kabir asks both the Hindus and Muslims to adhere to the true way of worship. He cautions them about the futility of shouting Allah's name loudly to call the faithful to prayer, and explains that the all-knowing God is omnipresent and pervades every atom:

> If God can be attained by worshipping stones
> Then why not worship the mountain
> Better still is the millstone
> It provides the flour for the whole world to eat!

Or,

> They raised a mosque by laying together pebbles and stones
>
> And from its top the Mullah cries hoarse to call the faithful to prayer

As though God is deaf

Lalleshwari too appears to be saying the same thing in these lines others:

Shiva resides in every atom of the universe
Do not differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim
If you are wise, then you should realize your true self
That alone is your acquaintance with the Lord

Like Kabir, Lalleshwari's verses reflect the light of her deep mystical experience. Says Kabir:

He has no face, nor forehead
He is neither beautiful nor ugly
The Lord is a unique entity—
Subtler than the fragrance of a flower

And Lalleshwari says:

The idol is stone and the temple too is stone
From top to bottom all is of the same stuff
Who will you worship, therefore, O foolish Pandit?
Unite your vital airs and your mind

In another verse of his Kabir says:

The rosary turns in the hand
And the tongue turns in the mouth
The mind turns in all the ten directions
This is no way to remember God

Lalleshwari also cautions us about such meaningless acts:

O man why are you twisting ropes of sand?
Holding on to it, you cannot hope to move your boat

The idea implicit in Kabir's *"jhini-jhini chadariya"* finds expression in one of Lalleshwari's most poignant *vaaks*:

I Lalla went forth hoping I would blossom
Like a cotton flower
But the ginner's and the carder's blows
Scotched me hard
The spinner spun me into a fine yarn
And the weaver suspended me on his loom in his shop
The washerman dashed me on the washing stone
And the tailor's scissors made me aware of the way
To attain what is the supreme state

Lalleshwari believes in attaining the supreme state through goodwill, right thought, unostentatious living and purity of conduct. And so does Kabir:

Live peaceably in the company of everyone
Be on intimate terms with every person
Say "Yes Sir, Yes Sir" to all
That is how you should live in your village

In another verse he says:

Just as there is oil inside a sesamum seed
And fire inside a flint stone
Your Lord resides within you
Wake up if you can!

And here is what Lalleshwari has to say about her realization:

The lamp blazed and my true self was revealed to me
Then I diffused outside my inner light
And seized it in the darkness of the night

If Kabir believes God to be formless and without attributes, Lalleshwari's conception of God is not much different:

You alone are the heavens and you are the earth
And you alone are the day, the air, the night
You are the offerings of rice grain, sandalwood, flowers and water
You are everything, so what to offer to you?

There is no doubt that Lalleshwari and Kabir are two representative voices of the same age. One is the voice of the Vitasta, the other of the Ganga. Both are immortal singers of the ageless unity of the Indian soul.

(Translated from Hindi by
Dr. Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani)

Chapter 12

CONCLUDING REMARKS

M.K. Kaw

Friends,

We have listened to scholars all day long. People have approached Lal Ded from different aspects-as a mystic, as a Shaivite devotee, as poet, as architect of Kashmiri language, as a feminist, as a social reformer and so on. But in this whole process of dissection of a great personality, we should not forget that Lal Ded was a holistic person. She was all these rolled into one, in a unique and unparalleled manner. She was Lal Ded and whatever she did came from the core of her personality.

On the question of whether she was a Hindu or a Muslim saint, I think that many great saints have been subjected to similar controversies. Two major examples are Kabir and Sai Baba of Shirdi. To my mind, it is pointless to circumscribe the personality and experience of these great souls in a straitjacket. Mystics have all had similar experiences while realizing the oneness of all phenomena. The experiences have to be the same. Human beings are the same. Therefore, mystic experiences cannot, by definition, be different. It is fruitless to argue whether a particular mystic draws his experiences from Hindu sources or Muslim sources.

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What is remarkable about Lal Ded that living in tumultuous times, she was able to retain her catholicity, eclecticism and tolerance. Today, when we have been subjected as a community to unprecedented trauma and feel injured in our soul, we need to recall her equipoise and emotional balance so that our wounds are healed.

In the outer world, there is always bound to be a contest between the forces of good and evil, those of compassionate humanism and those of fundamentalist extremism. We have to accept the negative as being as much part of the will of the divine, as the positive is. There is a divine design to the happenings of the universe. This world is a drama. We have to play our allotted role and play it well.

If we model ourselves on Lal Ded, we can retain our sanity and survive these troubled times. It is her voice of reason that can be a beacon-light of hope to the whole of humanity and guide us all to the divine. That, ladies and gentlemen, is her relevance to the modern age.

Section 3

SOME SELECT LALLAVAAKHS

CHAPTER 13

SOME VAAKHS OF LAL DED AND THEIR ENGLISH TRANSLATION

PROF. NEERJA MATTOO

1. *tsālun chhu vuzmalú tú traṭay,*
tsālun chhu mandinyan gaṭ akār
tsālun chhu pān panun kaḍun graṭay
hētú māil santūsh vātiy pānay.

(Be ready to endure lightning and cloudbursts
Or a sudden pall of darkness at noon
Or the body crushed between two grindstones!
Accept it all with patience and contentment will come.)

2. *abyaāsi savikaāsi layi vāthū,*
gaganas sagun myūl sami tsraṭā
shūnya gōl tay anāmay mōtu,
yōhōy vōpúdīsh chhuy baṭā.

(Practice constantly to absorb the manifested,
The world of form merges into the void
The void dissolves, the One ineffable remains-
This is the truth to learn, O Batta!)

3.

tsĕth tŏrug gagana bramavŏn,
nimishi aki thsanḍi yūzan lachh,
tsĕtani vāgi bwŏdi raṭith zŏn,
prān apān phuṭ arith pakhachi

(The mind-horse gallops over the skies,
Momently traverses a million miles.
Consciousness-bridle will hold it in check,
Control the wings of the airs that go up and down.)

4.

shiv gur tay kēshav palnas,
brahmā pāydan vŏisvas
yūgi yūga kali parzā nyas
kus dīv ashvavār pĕṭh chaḍyas

(Shiva is the horse, Keshava the saddle,
And Brahma becomes the stirrup.
The yogi through his yoga will come to know,
Which God will dare to mount this horse)

5.

anahat kha so'ruph shunyalay,
yas nav na varan na guthur na ruph,
aham vimarshi nad binduy yas vo'n,
suy dīv ashvavarpeth chadyas.

(The unimpaired sound, the void of the sky,
The One with no name nor family nor caste,
Just the Self-aware Sound and the Dot eternal !
That God alone will mount this horse.)

6.

tsĕth tŏrug vagi hĕth roṭ um
tsĕlith milivith dash nāḍi vāv
tavay shashikal vyagalith vàtshúm,
shūnyas shūnyāh mīlith gav.

(The mind-horse I reined in and put on course,
Holding him still with the ten air-channels.

The mystic moon melted and downwards flowed,
And the void was absorbed into the void!)

7. *àsī aàsy tú àsī āsav,*
asīdōr kàr patúvath,
shivas sōri na zyŏn tú marun,
ravas sori na atúgath.

(We existed in the past, we shall in future,
It's we who came and went through the aeons.
Shiva must create and destroy perpetually,
Forever the sun must rise and set.)

8. *yimah shĕ tsĕ, timay shĕ mĕ,*
shyāmagalā tsĕ byan ṭōṭhus.
yŏhōy bĕnābĕd tsĕ tú mĕ,
tsú shyan saàmī, bŏ shĕyi mushis.

(The six You have, I have too,
Blue-throated One, estranged from you I suffer !
The only difference between You and me—
You are master of the six, while I enslaved !)

9. *dĕshi āyas dash dishi tsàlith,*
tsàlith tsoṭum shūnya adú vāv,
shivúy dyūnṭhum shāyi shāyi mīlith,
shĕ tú trĕ trŏpimas tú shivúy drāv.

(Through the ten directions I raced and came home,
Fleeing, I pierced the void and the wind,
And I found Shiva present everywhere,
Closed the there and six and He appeared, Immanent!)

10. *trĕyi nĕngi sarāh sari saras*
aki nĕngi saras arshas jāy
harmŏkhú kaunsar akh sum saras
sati nĕngi saras shūnyākār.

(Thrice the lake overflowed its banks, I remember
And once the lake did rise to the sky
One lake it was from the Harmukh to the Kaunsar
And seven times the void swallowed the lake.)

11.

dīv vaṭā dīvar vaṭā
pĕthú bŏn chhuy īkvāṭh
pūz kas karakh hūṭa baṭā
kar manas tú pavanas sangāṭh.

(Your idol is stone, the temple a stone too.
All a stone bound together from top to toe!
What is it you worship, you dense Brahmin ?
True worship must bind the vital air of the heart to the mind.)

12.

lal bŏ drāyas kapas pōshi sàtsúy
kaàtsi tú dūny kàrnam yàtsúy lath
tuy yĕli khaàrnas zaàviji tuyĕ
vōvuri vānā gàyam alaànz lath,

dŏby yĕli chhaàvnas dŏby kani pĕṭhay
sz tú sāban màtshnam yàtsúy
sútsi yĕli phirnam hani hani kàtsúy
adú lali mĕ praàvum param gath.

(I, Lal, set out, hoping to bloom like a cotton flower,
But was beaten and trampled by ginner and carder,
Shredded and spun into so fine a yarn,
And hung and hit by the weaver on his loom;

Thrashed and kneaded on the washerman's stone,
Pasted and plastered with soap and clayey earth,
Till the tailor's skilful scissors worked on my limbs,
And I found my place in the Highest Abode!)

13. *karúm zú kāran trĕ kŏmbith*
yavú labakh parlūkas ānkh
wvath khas siriy manḍalas tsŏmbith
taay tsali maranyin shānkh.

(Give up the *karmas* two and causes three,
And you will find an insight into the higher world,
Arise and ascend and tear through the sun's orb,
Thus will you overcome the fear of death)

14. *dàchhhinis ŏbras zāyun zāhahaà*
sŏdras zānahaà kaḍithaṭh
màndis rōgiyas vaidyut zānahaà
mūḍas zaànim na prànith kath.

I could learn to disperse the southern clouds,
I could learn to drain out the sea,
I could learn to heal the sores of a leper,
But I could never learn the art to convince a fool!)

15. *tsā mar chhatúr rath simhāsan,*
hiād nātya ras tula prākh
kyāh maànith yĕti sthir āsvun
kava zan kāsiy marúnúni shānkh.

(A royal fly whisk, sunshade, chariot and throne,
Gaiety, joys of theatre, a bed of softest down,
Which of these do you think will last for ever?
How then will you overcome the fear of death?)

16. *dàmī ḍīnṭhúm nad vahvànī*
dàmī ḍyūnṭhum sum na tú nār
dàmī ḍnṭhúm thàr phŏlúvunī
dàmī ḍyūnṭhum gul na tú khār

(It was but now I saw a river in spate,
And now there's no bridge nor ferry,

It was but now that I saw a bush in bloom
And now there's no flower nor thorn!)

17.

dàmī ḍīnṭhúm gàj dazvúnī
dàmī ḍyūnṭhum dúh na tú nār
dàmī ḍīnṭhúm Pānḍavan húnz maàjī
dàmī ḍīnṭhúm kraàji mās.

(It was but now I saw a hearth ablaze
And now there is no smoke nor fire
It was but now I saw her as the Pandavas' mother
And now she is merely a potter's aunt!)

18.

charman tsàṭīth ditith pàny pānas
tyuth kyāh vavyōth phalihī sōv?
mūḍas vopdīsh gàyi rīnz dumaṭas,
kani dāndas gōr āprith rōv

(All you did was stretch your own skin taut and peg it down
What had you sown to expect a bumper harvest?
Preaching to a fool is like pelting a rock with marbles,
A colossal waste, fruitless as feeding a bull with a jaggery

19.

hachivi haàrinji pĕtsyuv kān gōm
abakh chhān pyōm yath rāzdānē
manzbāg bāzras kuluphú rōs vān gōm
tīrthú rōs pān gōm, kus māli zānē.

(For my wooden bow, a rush for an arrow !
An unskilled carpenter for a royal mansion!
In the marketplace, a shop unguarded!
A body uncleansed by waters holy am I,
Oh who can tell my plight!)

20.

lal bŏ drāyas lōlarē
thsāndān lūsum dyan kyŏhŏ rāth
vuchhum pàndith panúni garē,
suy mĕ rŏtmas nĕchhúthar tú sāth,

(Driven by love, I Lal, rushed out
And searched till the end of night and day,
But the Pandit I found esconced within,
And that for me was the perfect moment, propitious my stars!)

(From the forthcoming book on women poets of Kashmir).

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Dr. S.S. Toshkhani, the editor, is a renowned scholar of India and belongs to a great intellectual family of Kashmir. His father late Prof. S.K. Toshkhani was a legendary scholar of Kashmir's literature, language and culture. Dr. Toshkhani is a poet, linguist, writer and thinker. He has contributed substantially to Kashmiri heritage and carried out modern research in various fields of Kashmiri literature, history, religion, art and social science in general. He is a member of the research committee of Kashmiri Education, Culture and Science Society. He is conducting research on Bhakti tradition in Kashmiri Poetry as a Senior Fellow (on a fellowship from the Ministry of Culture) and on rituals and visual arts of Kashmir at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. He has been associated in many leading seminars conducted by Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society. Dr. Toshkhani, therefore, represents a great tradition of scholarship of Kashmir and Kashmiri Pandits.

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